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Allegiances

SUNCLAN

LEADER **Flowerstar**- Pale gray she-cat with light green eyes

DEPUTY **Tigertail**- Brown tom with a long striped tail and amber eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Poppyfur**- Pale ginger she-cat with black spots and green eyes

WARRIORS *(toms and she-cats without kits)*

Thornpelt- Pale brown tabby tom, covered in battle scars, amber eyes.

Crowfur- Black she-cat with amber eyes

Apprentice, Adderpaw

Bramblepelt- Brown tabby tom with green eyes

Apprentice, Squirrelpaw

Rainears- Black she-cat with with white ears and blue eyes

Apprentice, Turtlepaw

Icepetal- White she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice, Fawnpaw

Sunstream- Golden she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Dawnpaw

Rustpelt- Ginger tom with amber eyes

Apprentice, Lionpaw

Windflight- Sleek light brown she-cat with light green eyes.

Snowtail- Fluffy white she-cat with dark blue eyes

Snakewhisker- Gray tom with long whiskers and green eyes

Apprentice, Redpaw

Sandfoot- Calico she-cat with light ginger paws and green eyes

Apprentice, Goldenpaw

Rockfur- Big dark gray tom with amber eyes

Stormwind- Light gray she-cat with light blue eyes.

Blazeheart-Golden brown tabby tom with dark green eyes

Applespots- Tortishell she-cat with green eyes

APPRENTICES *(more than six moons old, in training to become warriors)*

Redpaw- Ginger tom with green eyes

Squirrelpaw- Ginger she-cat with green eyes

Turtlepaw- Mottled brown tom with green eyes

Dawnpaw- Golden/brown tabby she-cat with white paws, chest, and bright green eyes

Lionpaw- Golden tom with amber eyes

Goldenpaw- Golden she-cat with green eyes

Adderpaw- Silver tom with lighter tabby markings

Fawnpaw- Light brown she-cat with lighter flecks on her haunches

QUEENS *(she-cats expecting or nursing kits)*

Dovetail- Soft light gray she-cat with blue eyes, nursing Rockfur's kits (Cinderkit, dark gray she-cat, Pebblekit, gray and white she-cat and Yarrowkit, fluffy pale gray tom)

Willownose- Brown she-cat with a distinct pink nose, expecting Bramblepelt's kits

ELDERS (*former warriors and queens, now retired)*

Hawktalon- Brown tabby tom with long claws, blind

Nightwing- Once pretty black she-cat with unusual blue eyes.

ASHCLAN

LEADER **Lionstar**- Dark golden tom with green eyes

DEPUTY **Echoheart** - Silver and white tabby she-cat with green eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Moonwhisker** - Small silver she-cat with black tabby stripes and blue eyes.

WARRIORS **Riverstorm** - Blue-gray she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice, Ashpaw

Lilyclaw - Gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Silverpaw

Graypelt - Dark gray tom with amber eyes

Apprentice, Stormpaw

Mudthorn - Dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Cloverstrike - Brown tabby she-cat with green eyes

Nightstorm - Dark gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

Crowstep - Gray tom with black paws and amber eyes

Ratpelt - Light brown tom with a long scar across his leg

Featherfall - Silver tabby tom with blue eyes

Leafwind - Mottled brown she-cat with amber eyes

Harewhisker - Light brown tom with amber eyes

Grasstail - Brown tabby tom with green eyes

Apprentice, Larkpaw

Petalshine - Silver and white tabby she-cat

Apprentice, Wheatpaw

APPRENTICES **Stormpaw** - Gray tom with dark green eyes

Silverpaw - Silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Ashpaw - Dark gray tabby tom with amber eyes

Larkpaw - Dark brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Wheatpaw - Light brown tom with darker flecks and green eyes

QUEENS **Foxfeather** - Ginger tabby she-cat with green eyes, nursing Mudthorn's kits (Hawkkit, brown tabby tom, and Harekit, light brown tabby she-kit)

ELDERS **Sharptounge** - Brown tabby tom, known for bad attitude.

MOONCLAN

LEADER **Crowstar** - Black and silver tom with yellow eyes

DEPUTY **Hawkface** - Dark gray tabby tom with blue eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Ravenheart** - Black tom with a white flecked chest

WARRIORS **Ravenwing** - Pretty dark gray she-cat with dark blue eyes

Dovestorm - Light gray she-cat with pale blue eyes

Apprentice, Violetpaw

Pigeonpelt - Light gray tom with pale yellow eyes

Jayfur - Gray tom with large paws and green eyes

Feathercloud - Fluffy white she-cat with blue eyes

Frostfire - White she-cat with pale gray flecks and green eyes

Apprentice, Mosspaw

Smudgenose - Black and white tom with a black mark on his nose

Apprentice, Swiftpaw

Lightningwing - Sleek white she-cat

Smallstrike - Small dark gray tabby tom with light blue eyes

Shadeflower - Black and gray she-cat with amber eyes

Tawnytail - Tortishell she-cat with green eyes

Shadowpelt - Dark gray tom with amber eyes

Apprentice, Bonepaw

Mistflower - Light gray she-cat

Ebonywing - Black she-cat with white paws and yellow eyes

Apprentice, Icepaw

APPRENTICES **Violetpaw** - Dark gray she-cat with unusual blue

eyes

Mosspaw - Tortieshell she-cat with green eyes

Bonepaw - Large white tom with yellow eyes

Swiftpaw - Gray tom with green eyes

Icepaw - White she-cat with dark blue eyes

QUEENS **Ashfeather** - Black she-cat with blue eyes, nursing Smallstrike's kits (Tallkit, abnormally long dark gray she-cat and Brokenkit, dark gray tabby tom with a crooked tail)

ELDERS **Brambleflight** - Dark brown tom with amber eyes

Sandfur - Pale ginger she-cat with blue eyes

Longwhisker - Long legged black tom with white paws and chest

Rainypelt - Small siamese she-cat

Dogtail - Large brown tom with a short tail and amber eyes

LICHENCLAN

LEADER **Jaggedstar** - Brown tabby tom with a crooked tail and amber eyes

DEPUTY **Mossleaf** - Brown she-cat with lighter markings and green eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Barkclaw** - Brown tom with yellow eyes

WARRIORS **Foxwhisker** - Dark ginger tom with a white tipped tail

Apprentice, Leafpaw

Mousethorn - Long haired tom with green eyes

Owlheart - Brown tabby she-cat with green eyes

Branchfur - Dark brown tom with dark amber eyes

Apprentice, Heatherpaw

Twigheart - Small light brown she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Oakpaw

Maplepool - Brown and cream she-cat with amber eyes

Apprentice, Mudpaw

Brackenheart - Red-brown tabby tom with a light brown chest

Tigerfang- Dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Apprentice, Rowanpaw

Seedclaw- Black and white tom with green eyes, former kittypet

Owlstripe- Brown tabby tom with green eyes

Larkclaw - Brown tabby she-cat with a white tipped tail

Rustleaf - Ginger she-cat with amber eyes

APPRENTICES **Leafpaw** - Light brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Heatherpaw - White and black she-cat with blue eyes

Mudpaw - Dark brown and white tom with yellow eyes

Rowanpaw - Dark red-brown tom with dark green eyes

QUEENS **Flamewhisker** - Ginger she-cat with green eyes, nursing Branchfur's kits (Timberkit, brown tom with amber eyes and Rootkit, dark brown she-kit with green eyes)

ELDERS **Shorttail** - Brown tabby tom with amber eyes and a stubbed tail

Barksong - Once pretty brown she-cat with cloudy amber eyes

Fieldfoot - Light golden-brown tom with green eyes

[image]

[image]

Prologue

Poppyfur looked around her herb store, making sure everything was neat and in place before she left. The cream and black she-cat poked her head out of the medicine cat den, the sun was slowly falling and the half-moon was going to take its place. With one last check, Poppyfur exited the medicine cat den only to be greeted by a golden brown tabby tom racing towards her.

"What is it, Blazeheart?" She questioned with a half-sigh, she assumed it was another false alarm with his mate's kits.

"I think Windflight is *actually* having her kits this time! She's in a lot pain, more than usual. Sunstream and Dovetail think it's time too." Blazeheart explained quickly, his amber eyes flashing with anxiety.

"I'll check and make sure." Poppyfur grumbled slightly, not wanting to waste her time with a queen who probably wasn't even having her kits. Windflight had about three false alarms a day, though this was the first one for today.

Blazeheart followed Poppyfur to the nursery, clearly stopping himself from running ahead of the medicine cat. Any new father would be nervous about his mate having kits, though Poppyfur assured him that Windflight's pregnancy had been completely safe and normal. Poppyfur stepped inside the medicine cat den where she saw Dovetail slowly lapping at Windflight's head, trying to keep her calm while Sunstream tried holding her two kits, Lionkit and Goldenkit back as they eagerly tried to see what was going on with Windflight.

Poppyfur looked over Windflight, the pale brown she-cat did look to be in a lot of pain. The medicine cat ran her forepaw over Windflight's belly, feeling movement. She took a deep breath, Windflight really was kitting this time. "It's happening." Poppyfur mewed, looking at Blazeheart and Sunstream. "Sunstream, do you remember what herbs I used for you?" The golden she-cat nodded.

"Take Blazeheart and the kits if you have to go get them, I'm going to prepare Windfight."

"I want to stay here." Blazeheart replied stubbornly. Poppyfur snorted, not in the mood for his attitude.

"You can't do anything here yet, go get the herbs and be helpful. Then you can come back in and soothe her." Blazeheart hesitated, but eventually turned tail and ran off towards the medicine cat den with Sunstream and her kits.

"How are you feeling, Windflight?" Poppyfur asked, forming a nest for the kits to fall into.

"It hurts." Windflight whimpered, her mew lined with pain. "Is that okay? Will the kits be okay?"

Poppyfur let out a purr to soothe her. "The kits will be fine, pain is the most natural part of having kits." Poppyfur looked up at Dovetail, noticing the pain and fear in the gray she-cats blue eyes. Dovetail may have just moved into the nursery but it wasn't her first time having kits. Dovetail's first litter of two didn't survive kitting, but now she was back in the nursery with hopefully kits that survived.

"Just breathe, Windflight. Blazeheart and Sunstream are coming with herbs. It will all be over soon, and then you'll have kits of your own." Windflight let out a pleased purr at Poppyfur's words, her eyes slowly closing for just a moment before she let out a cry of pain. A few moments later, Sunstream and Blazeheart stepped back into the medicine cat den with a bundle of herbs and a stick.

"Give the stick to her." Poppyfur instructed Blazeheart who set the stick down in front of Windflight, nudging it towards her mouth. Windflight's green eyes burned with love as she looked at her mate.

"I'll let you take over." Dovetail said softly, moving over to sit behind Poppyfur and letting Blazeheart be up by Windflight's head.

Sunstream stepped outside, keeping Lionkit and Goldenkit occupied, Poppyfur was grateful for the intelligent queen's action.

Poppyfur placed her paw on Windflight's belly once more, feeling a strong ripple. "They'll be here soon, Windflight. Hold on." The kitting she-cat's body jolted in pain, her teeth clamping down on the stick that had been provided.

Blazeheart tensed but kept lapping at Windflight's ears and whispering sweet and soothing words to the queen. Poppyfur waited for the next cry of pain, as it would probably bring a kit along with it.

Just as she suspected, Windflight bit down on the stick once more and a small kit tumbled into the nest. "Dovetail." She commanded. "Come get this kit, get it's blood flowing." Dovetail didn't hesitate, she picked up the small bundle and began rapidly licking its fur in the opposite direction. Poppyfur could see the determination in the queen's actions, she didn't want to lose this kit like she lost hers.

Windflight let out another cry of pain and another kit fell, Poppyfur gave this one to Blazeheart who quickly took to licking it and making it warm. Poppyfur's ears twitched as she heard the first kit let out a loud mew. *It's a strong one. Good.* Poppyfur thought, placing her paw on Windflight's belly once more. "There's one more, Windflight. You're doing wonderful." There was another cry from across the nursery as the second kit began mewling for it's mother.

Feeling hopeful, Poppyfur waited for the next kit. This one came quickly, quicker than she expected as a tiny kit fell into the nest. Poppyfur took it upon herself to lick this small kit, it was smaller than the older two but big enough to live. It didn't take long before all three kits were crying for milk.

"It's a she-kit." Poppyfur mewed, looking down at the kit before her. A small golden-brown tabby she-cat like her father. Only with a white chest and tiny white paws, Poppyfur felt a rush of joy as she looked at the squirming ball of fur.

"This one is a she-cat too!" Dovetail announced, Poppyfur looked over at the other she-cat. A small, light brown she-cat who thrashed and yowled like a fox in a fit. Poppyfur mewed with amusement. "She's a fighter." Dovetail purred, setting the brown she-cat at Windflight's belly alongside the golden-brown she-cat.

"This one is a tom." Blazeheart purred, love overtaking his entire expression. The tom was mottled brown, also squirming for milk. When Blazeheart set his son down , Windflight looked down at them as they fought for milk.

"They're so beautiful." Her voice cracked and her green eyes filled with love, she looked up at Poppyfur. "Thank you so much."

"It's my job." Poppyfur dipped her head. "You did all the hard work." Poppyfur dipped her head, looking to see if Windflight was still bleeding or in any danger. *Such an easy birth.* Poppyfur couldn't help but feel grateful, ever since Dovetail's lost litter she had grown anxious about helping queens have their kits, but after Sunstream's successful birth as well as Windflight's just now, she was starting to feel more and more comfortable.

"Don't you have to go to the moonstone?" Poppyfur turned to see Sunstream behind her. "It's the half-moon."

Poppyfur suddenly remembered that she was on her way to the moonstone. "Yes, I do." She looked back at Windflight who was still lovingly gazing at her kits. "Windflight, I will be back in the morning with some herbs to help you." Windflight gave a nod and Poppyfur rushed out of the nursery, she was surprised to see that most of the Clan was still awake. Even the young apprentice, Fawnpaw. Poppyfur spotted Flowerstar sitting near the SunTree speaking with her sister, Stormwind.

"How are the kits?" Flowerstar asked when she spotted the medicine cat, her soft green eyes curious.

"Perfectly strong and healthy." Poppyfur replied. "There's three, two she-cats and a tom."

"Wonderful." Stormwind purred, her blue eyes distant. Stormwind was Dovetail's mother, another cat who had been devastated by the loss of Dovetail's two kits. "With Lionkit and Goldenkit at four moons old, we'll have a full apprentice den here soon."

"That's always a good sign." Flowerstar purred. "Apprentices mean warriors."

"I'd love to stay and talk," Poppyfur mewed, looking up at the night sky. "But I need to hurry to the moonstone."

"I understand. "Flowerstar dipped her head. "I'll see you when you get back." Poppyfur dipped her head, bidding farewell to Flowerstar and Stormwind then ran as quickly as she could out of the camp and into SunClan territory.

She nearly sprinted through the territory, quickly reaching the MoonClan border. She made her way across the branch that acted as a bridge, figuring that the other medicine cats had already made their way to the moonstone without her. Poppyfur moved at a quick pace through MoonClan territory, leaping over the small river that separated MoonClan from the Spirit Woods.

A beautiful and haunting area filled with white trees that glowed in the moonlight. In the center of these woods was the Spirit Tree, which housed the moonstone. Poppyfur scented the other medicine cats that had passed through here earlier. Poppyfur reached the Spirit Tree and descended into the dark tunnel with ease, remembering when he had been terrified the first time she had ever been in the cave. When Poppyfur stepped into the cavern, she could see the rest of the medicine cats resting around the stone. She didn't waste any time touching her nose to the stone and letting darkness take hold of her.

Poppyfur woke up up in the Spirit Woods, the usual place where she met with her StarClan ancestors. She looked around, still feeling breathless from her quick journey to the moonstone. It wasn't long before a familiar, warm and sweet scent filled the air around her. Poppyfur noticed a shimmering, golden she-cat with green eyes.

"Honeywing." Poppyfur stood up, greeting her former mentor. Honeywing's eyes were soft and kind, as they always were.

"Welcome, Poppyfur." Honeywing dipped her head. "How are the new SunClan kits?" She questioned.

"Wonderful." Poppyfur replied. "They were born very strong, the brown she-cat was very loud.

"That's good." Honeywing purred. Poppyfur couldn't help but notice a strange look in Honeywing's eyes, what was the StarClan cat thinking?
"Is there anything else?" Poppyfur questioned. "Something you needed to tell me?"

Honeywing looked away, something shadowing her bright gaze. "Yes there is." The golden she-cat took a deep breath and looked back at Poppyfur, her eyes now steady and strict. "When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun." A shiver went down Poppyfur's spine.

"What is that? Is that a prophecy? What does it mean?" The questions poured from Poppyfur, unsure of what to think. She had never received a prophecy before.

Honeywing hushed her softly. "Don't worry about it too much, Poppyfur. You cannot use all your time fretting about this one prophecy. It will soon come to light what those words mean to you and to your Clan."

"Since I got it tonight," Poppyfur added. "Do you think that it has something to do with Windflight's kits?" Poppyfur thought back to the brown she-cat, mewling and yowling as loud as can be. *Could she be the subject of this prophecy?*

"Time will tell." Honeywing purred. "Now return to your Clan, Poppyfur. We will speak again soon, I promise." She stepped forward, touching her nose to Poppyfur's and before the medicine cat could respond she was waking up in the moonstone cavern with her fellow medicine cats."

"Look who decided to show up." Poppyfur didn't even need to turn to recognize the toxic tone of Eagleclaw, the AshClan medicine cat. She turned to face him, his amber eyes sharp with annoyance. His brown tabby pelt was thin and dull, and he was incredibly skinny. *How long before this cranky old tom joins StarClan?* Poppyfur asked herself. Next to Eagleclaw was a much more pleasant cat to both look at and be around. His apprentice, Moonwhisker. A beautiful, silver tabby she-cat with icy blue eyes and striking black tabby markings.

"I apologize for showing up late," Poppyfur mewed, looking over at the other two medicine cats. Barkclaw of LichenClan and Ravenheart of MoonClan. "Windflight had her kits."

"How many did she have?" Moonwhisker asked, her blue eyes sparkling. "And are they healthy?"

"She had three of them." Poppyfur purred, Moonwhisker reminded her so much of Honeywing. "And yes they're all very strong and healthy."

"That's wonderful news." Ravenheart dipped his head kindly. "New kits are a blessing for all Clans."

"That is very true." Barkclaw added, his yellow eyes sparkling.

"Can we stop chattering like a bunch of starlings and get a move on?" Eagleclaw growled. "I'd like to make it back to my den before I collapse of old age." He grunted, pushing past the other medicine cats. The four of them shared an amused laugh and followed the bitter tom.

The medicine cats, with the exception of Eagleclaw shared idle conversation as they made their ways back to their own territories. Ravenheart and Poppyfur bid farewell to Eagleclaw, Moonwhisker and Barkclaw and walked together through MoonClan territory until Poppyfur made it back onto her own land.

By the time she reached the camp, the sun was starting to rise. The dawn patrol would be leaving soon, Poppyfur figured she should run some herbs to Windflight before she went to bed. Once in camp, Poppyfur cast a glance towards Flowerstar's den, she would probably tell her leader about Honeywing's prophecy, but after she got some sleep.

Poppyfur grabebd a jawful of borage leaves from her den to bring to Windflight, she was surprised to find the she-cat already awake. "Welcome back." Windflight purred as Poppyfur stepped into the den.

"How are the kits?" Poppyfur asked, looking at the three bundles of

fur sleeping soundly against their mothers belly.

"They're wonderful." Windflight gazed lovingly down at them. "They have names too."

"What are they?" Poppyfur questioned.

"The tom is Turtlekit, because of his pretty brown coat, the brown she-cat is Willowkit and the golden-brown she-cat is Dawnkit."

"Dawnkit?" Poppyfur echoed, the words of Honeywing's prophecy ringing in her ears. *When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun.* "How did you come up with that one?"

"Turtlekit and Willowkit came to me so easily," Windflight responded, wrapping her tail around her kits. "But I couldn't think of a name for her, but when I was sleeping it came to me in a dream. From that moment on I knew it was perfect."

Poppyfur looked at little Dawnkit, she was smaller than her siblings and not as loud. She twitched in her sleep and her little face looked so peaceful. Poppyfur originally thought the prophecy would be about Willowkit, but now she was sure it was about little Dawnkit. What future did this she-cat hold in her paws?

[image]

Chapter 1

Sunlight filtered in through the tiny gaps of the nursery, speckling the cats inside with golden light. A tiny golden brown she-cat rustled as the lights danced across her eyelids. She opened her green eyes, blinking away sleep. She rose to her white paws and stretched, yawning.

"What are you doing away, Dawnkit?" Dawnkit glanced over her shoulder at her mother, Windflight. The brown she-cat must have been roused with Dawnkit stirred.

"I just woke up, it's morning right?" Dawnkit asked, her paws itching to explore and discover. Windflight let out a slight, tired laugh.

"Almost, it's dawn. The dawn patrol should be leaving soon." Dawnkit's ears twitched.

"Can I watch?" She requested eagerly. Windflight's eyes glowed softly, but her eyelids drooped. "From the nursery. Then get back to sleep." The queen laid her head back down. Dawnkit bounded over to the entrance of the nursery, peering into the camp. Windflight had been right, outside the warriors den stood a group of warriors. A brown tom stood before them, giving orders. His long black striped marked him as the Clan deputy, Tigertail. Out of the group Dawnkit picked a particular golden-brown tabby tom. Her father, Blazeheart. He didn't seem to notice her, he was focused on the patrol. The warriors soon left, leaving Dawnkit;s pelt buzzing with excitement. *Someday that's gonna be me!* Despite her reluctance, Dawnkit turned away, she slowly padded back to her nest and curled up. However, she didn't sleep. She instead waited for one of her siblings to wake up.

Willowkit was the first one awake, she was full of energy from the second she opened her green eyes and the first thing she did was pounce on Dawnkit. This happened every morning so surprise

wasn't an issue. It was more the eight of her much larger sister crushing her.

"Get off me, furball!' Dawnkit hissed through her teeth as Willowkit's light brown fur covered her vision. Willowkit rolled off laughing. "Rude!" Dawnkit spat, smoothing her ruffled fir. She wasn't really mad at her sister, it was all fun and games.

Willowkit sneered and shook, ruffling her fur even more. Her eyes turned to their brother Turtlekit. He was still sleeping as ball of mottled brown fur. Willowkit didn't pounce on Turtlekit, she instead jabbed her paw into his side. Turtlekit let out a slight yel but did not wake up.

"Toms are such lazy furballs!' Willowkit hissed and launched herself on Turtlekit, the two did a somersault backwards. As Dawnkit watched she choked back laughter, she heard an angered his from Turtlekit as well as the laughter of Willowkit.

Willowkit stumbled backwards as Turtlekit pushed her away. Dawnkit saw her sister come right towards her. Dawnkit scrambled out of the way, but not entirely. Her tail was crushed under the weight of Willowkit's body. Dawnkit let out a sharp yowl of pain and yanked her tail out from underneath her sister.

"Kits!" A harsh hiss came from Windflight, Dawnkit and her siblings turned to look at their mother whose eyes were ablaze with anger and annoyance. "Settle down." She growled. "You're worse than a bunch of foxes in a fit. You're going to wake Dovetail's kits." Shame washed over Dawnkit, her ears went back and her pelt grew hot. She glanced over and saw that Turtlekit looked the same way, Willowkit however seemed bored.

"This den is so crowded." Willowkit complained. "We can't do anything with those kits in here." She flicked her tiny tail.

"Those kits will be your fellow warriors one day." Windflight said sternly, the brown she-cat sighed. "I suppose you three are old enough to explore the camp."

Dawnkit and her siblings moods were instantly lifted. "Really?"

They said in unison.

Windflight nodded, then added sharply: "But behave and be respectful. One bad word and you won't see the camp tull you're apprentices!" But Willowkit was already gone and Turtlekit was on her heels. As Dawnkit rushed after them Windflight stopped her. "One moment, Dawnkit."

She stopped and turned to face Windflight. "Yes, mother?"

"Watch over them, Willowkit is reckless and Turtlekit will blindly follow her. Just take care of them. " Her eyes sparked with concern.

Dawnkit let out a soft purr. "I will, I promise."

Windflight's eyes glowed. "Now have fun." Dawnkit bounded from the nursery where Turtlekit and Willowkit stood waiting.

"Slowpoke!" Willowkit hissed and lightly shoved Dawnkit.

Dawnkit shoved her back, laughing. "Where to first?" Willowkit looked around, her dark eyes squinting.

"There!" The small brown cat took off, not letting either of her littermates know where she was going. Dawnkit was quick to follow but struggled to keep up. Both Turtlekit and Willowkit were bigger, stronger and faster than Dawnkit. Being the youngest wasn't very fun.

It's your job to watch over them. A voice whispered in her ear. As she ran she looked over her shoulder to see no one there. In her confusion Dawnkit failed to notice Turtlekit had stopped an Dawnkit bowled into him who in turn crashed into Willowkit.

"Watch it!' Willowkit hissed and rose to her paws; shaking off bits of dust.

"What's your problem?" Turtlekit growled at Dawnkit, who grew hot with embarrassment. "Where are we?" He asked Willowkit, turning away from Dawnkit. The three kits stood before a large tangle of brambles, they opened up and inside was filled with moss and bracken

"It's a den." Willowkit said. "A big one, I'm guessing the warrior's den."

"You would be correct."

All three of them jumped and turned. A large tortoiseshell she-cat had approached them. Her distinct pale ginger paws gave away her name.

"Sandfoot." Willowkit spoke.

Sandfoot's eyes glowed. "First time out of the nursery?"

"Yep!" Turtlekit explained excitedly. Sandfoot gazed over each of the three kits.

"Well, why don't I show you where everything is?" She suggested. Dawnkit and her littermates nodded eagerly. "Well, there's the apprentice den." She flicked her tail towards a tree with a decent sized burrow underneath it. "Poppyfur's den." The medicine cat den was a large cut in the rockwall that sheltered the back of the camp. "The elder's den." The elders den was a log that leaned against a boulder that lined up against the backwall. "And there, is Flowerstar's den." RIght in the middle of the camp stood a large tree, the center was hollow and had an opening into the den. Dawnkit's eyes went wide. That was where the Clan leader slept, her pelt tingled with excitement. "It's not just Flowerstar's den though. It's also the--"

"SunTree!" Willowkit cut off Sandfoot.

"You need to learn to speak when it's your turn, Willowkit." Her kind, yet stern voice didn't seem to offset Willowkit. "But yes, it is the SunTree. It's where Flowerstar calls Clan meetings and holds ceremonies.

"It's where *I'm* going to stand one day!" Willowkit flexed her tiny claws and her eyes blazed with ambition.

Sandfoot gave her a small shove with her paw. "Only if you be patient." Willowkit let out a snort of contempt "I need to go now little ones, enjoy the camp." Sandfoot turned and bounded away.

"We should go to Flowerstar's den. I want to see what my future den will look like." Willowkit took off, and again Turtlekit was right behind her. Dawnkit let out a slight sigh before dashing after her littermates. They stopped at the SunTree, but Willowkit marched right on it. Dawnkit felt nerves creep up her spine. Surely they weren't allowed to simply walk into the leader's den. Yet, Turtlekit followed Willowkit, but could see the hair raise on his shoulders.

"Come on, Dawnkit!" Willowkit hissed over her shoulder.

"I don't think we should do this." Dawnkit said nervously, she unsteadily held her sister's gaze.

"Are you scared?" Willowkit sneered. Dawnkit's ears when back but she stood straight.

"No, it's just that if we get in trouble we don't get to leave the nursery." She tried to reason with her sister.

Willowkit scoffed and rolled her eyes. "Whatever, be scared." She continued on, Turtlekit followed but not without a doubtful glance over his shoulder at Dawnkit. Dawnkit sighed as her littermates vanished into the den. She attempted to cheer herself up by telling herself she could explore the camp by herself, but it only brought a hollow feeling to her heart. She was supposed to do it with her brother and sister. With a heavy heart and paws, she trudged away from the leader's den.

Dawnkit lifted her head and noticed the elder's den. She remembered Goldenpaw telling her about the incredible stories the elders would tell. Dawnkit's spirit was lifted slightly as she made her way to the den. Hoping they weren't sleeping, Dawnkit poked her head inside.

"Who's there?" A voice demanded. Dawnkit's body went stiff. Was she not supposed to be here?

"Oh, calm down Hawktalon, it's just a kit." Another voice spoke, this one a she-cat. "Come in little one." Dawnkit took light steps into the den, the inside was dim and full of soft moss. Two cats rested inside nests, one was a black she-cat, beams of sunlight broke through the

brambles and reflected off her eyes were the color of a cool, morning sky. The other cat was huge tom-cat with bold, black stripes over his brown pelt, his eyes were amber but seemed to be filled with clouds. However, the most striking feature was the claws that seemed to grow out of his paws.

"What's your name, kit?" The elder asked.

"Dawnkit." She mewed quietly.

"She's Windflight's daughter." The female elder, Dawnkit was pretty sure her name was Nightwing, explained.

"Ah," Hawktalon stretched. "Where are the other two?"

It took Dawnkit a second to realize Hawktalon was talking to her. "Uh, they wandered somewhere else."

Hawktalon narrowed his cloudy eyes. "Don't lie to me, kit." Dawnkit's ears flattened and she stared at the ground. She wanted to protect her littermates but somehow, the elder knew she was lying.

"They went into Flowerstar's den." She mumbled, Dawnkit expected both Nightwing and Hawktalon to get furious but both of them let out a slight chuckled.

"Trouble making kits." Nightwing purred.

"Why aren't you with them?" Hawktalon questioned.

"I didn't want to get in trouble." Dawnkit answered, sitting down now. She was starting to feel more comfortable.

"But that's what being a kit is all about." Hawktalon mewed. "When you're an apprentice you can't pull off shenanigans as well as when you're a kit."

"But my mother said if we got in trouble we wouldn't be able to leave the nursery." Dawnkit said. Hawktalon let out a mocking laugh.

"Windlight's always had a weakness for kits, she doesn't mean it for a second." Dawnkit cocked her head.

"She doesn't?"

Hawktalon nodded. "I was Windflight's mentor, she was always with the kits and giving them special treatment."

Dawnkit felt amusement rise in her chest. She never knew that about her mother.

"Dawnkit!" A somewhat angered mew came from outside, she recognized it as her mother's.

"Looks like your littermates have been caught." Nightwing mewed, her eyes glowing with amusement.

"I'll handle this." Hawktalon rose to his paws, letting out a slight grunt as he did so.

"What--" Dawnkit was cut off with a lash of Hawktalon's tail.

"Hush, kit. Follow me." He said, tone harsh and kind all at once.

"Don't be too harsh." Nightwing purred from her nest.

"Hawktalon's ears twitched in response. When they stepped out of the elder's den, Dawnkit saw her mother looking around. Beside her were Willowkit and Turtlekit. Turtlekit's ears were back, but Willowkit looked as if she had battled all of AshClan blind and won.

"Windflight." Hawktalon mewed boldly, the brown she-cat turned to look at him.

"Dawnkit!" She shouted with relief and swiftly padded over to her kit. "Where have you been?" She demanded.

"She's been with me and Nightwing." Hawktalon explained. Dawnkit noticed that Hawktalon wasn't looking directly at Windlight, he instead gazed past her, staring at nothing. *He's blind!* Dawnkit realized with alarm. How? Surely he couldn't be a mentor and be blind. Windflight glared slightly then moved her gaze down to

Dawnkit

"Why weren't you with your brother and sister." Windflight hissed the question.

Dawnkit flattened herself to the ground, wanting to disappear. "I--"

Hawktalon stepped in front of her before Dawnkit could finish. "She was avoiding the trouble these two were getting into."

Windflight faced her former mentor head on. "They should have stuck together."

"Dawnkit made the right decision and you know it." Dawnkit looked over at her two littermates, Willowkit was glaring at her and Turtlekit avoided her gaze all together. Dawnkit hid behind Hawktalon. "Don't punish them for being kits." Hawktalon said boldly.

"Don't tell me how to raise my kits." Windflight hissed in response. "Dawnkit, come." Dawnkit very nervously skittered over to her mother, avoiding Willowkit's toxic looks. "Let's go back." Windflight growled and began leading her kits away from the elder's den.

"Keep your head up, Dawnkit!" Hawktalon called from behind them. "You've got a bright future ahead of you!"

When they returned to the nursery Willowkit and Turtlekit fell asleep rather quickly, but Dawnkit couldn't sleep. She just lay curled up against her mother in the moss and bracken, staring out the nursery entrance. Night had fallen over the camp and cats were going to their dens.

"Why aren't you asleep?" Dawnkit felt her mother nuzzle her.

Dawnkit sat up and faced her. "I'm sorry for leaving Willowkit and Turtlekit." She apologized, staring at her white paws.

Windflight let out a slight purr. "It's alright Dawnkit, I understand why you did it."

"Willowkit hates me." Dawnkit mewed sadly.

"She doesn't hate you, she's just mad she got caught." Dawnkit looked over at her sister's sleeping form, her ears twitched as she explored a dream. "You two will be friends again tomorrow, and if you behave I will let you back into camp." Dawnkit felt her spirits lift in her chest.

"Thank you." She purred to her mother. Windflight touched her nose to Dawnkit's then a slight question crept into Dawnkit's mind. "Has Hawktalon always been blind?" She asked,

Something shadowed Windflight's gaze. "No, he only recently became blind."

"How?" Dawnkit asked curiously.

Windflight let out a very slight sigh. "We were patrolling our old border that was set against the Thunderpath, it wasn't a clan border, just one to keep us from going into twoleg territory. There was a strange, thick liquid on the surface. Hawktalon was investigating it and a monster dashed past, splashing the stuff onto all of us." A haunted look crossed Windflight's face. "The stuff was horrible, it clung to our fur like burrs. We couldn't get it off, when we tried washing ourselves but the taste was horrid. It soaked through our fur and clung to our skin. Most of us got it our chest and shoulders, Hawktalon got it on his face." Dawnkit shuddered as the image formed, Windflight moved so the light hit her left shoulder. It seemed lighter than the rest, but the fur was actually thinner. "The fur never completely grew back on any of us." Windflight said, laying back down.

"How did you get it off?"

"Poppyfur, or Poppypaw at the time came up with the idea. We rubbed honey onto the stuck and licked it off, well we also had to nearly chew and claw it at but it eventually came off."

"Wow," Dawnkit mewed, enjoying her mother's story.

"Keep an eye on Stormwind, Bramblepelt and Icepetal. They all have patches like mine. Icepetal and I were only apprentices at the time."

"I thought Hawktalon was your mentor."

"He was, I was made a warrior after it happened." Dawnkit nodded slowly, her head starting to droop. Windlight let out a purr. "Go to sleep, Dawnkit," She touched her nose to Dawnkit's forehead. "Adventures await you."

Dawnkit woke up early again, without disturbing her mother or littermate she went to watch the sunrise again.

"What are you doing?" Dawnkit turned to see Turtlekit, sleep still swam in his green eyes.

"Watching the sunrise," Dawnkit replied. "Want to join me?"

Turtlekit hesitated for a moment as his sleep fogged head worked. "Sure." He mewed after a few moments and moved to sit beside his sister. The two watched the dawn patrol form, this time noticed the dark tabby shape of Bramblepelt. Dawnkit squinted her eyes at him after looking at him for a few moments she noticed a light patch of her on his lower chest as well as a few spots on his legs.

"What are you looking at?" Turtlekit asked, more awake now.

"Bramblepelt." Dawnkit replied and relayed Windlight's story.

"Wow." Turtlekit said when she finished. "That's crazy, hope that doesn't happen again." Dawnkit nodded. They both heard a rustling as Willowkit stood from her nest. She blinked sleep from her eyes and gazed at Dawnkit and Turtlekit.

"What are you two doing?" She asked drowsily.

"Now who's the lazy furball?" Dawnkit said playfully. Willowkit puffed up and yawned.

"You three are up early." A purr came from from behind them, Dawnkit turned to see Dovetail looking at them, her kits nuzzled against her belly.

"You're gonna make us lay down aren't you?" Willowkit grumbled.

Dovetail's eyes glowed with amusement. "No, I was going to suggest you go into the camp and play." All three kits were alert now.

"Really?" Dawnkit mewed excitedly.

Dovetail nodded. "But stay near the nursery and out of dens." She sharpened her gaze at Willowkit and Turtlekit.

"We will!" Dawnkit said before her sister could reply. She felt Willowkit's glare on her back but ignored it.

"Let's go!" Turtlekit meowed and ran outside, his sister's following. "Where should we go?" He asked when they got outside.

"This way!" Willowkit bounded off towards the warrior's den."

Dawnkit bounded after her. "We're not supposed to go in any dens!" She called out.

Willowkit stopped suddenly, causing Dawnkit to nearly crash into her. "We're not going to." Willowkit hissed, her green eyes annoyed.

"Then where--"

Willowkit cut Dawnkit off. "Just shut up and follow." Willowkit turned and started walking, but stopped to look over her shoulder. "Unless you wanna run away again." Willowkit sneered and continued walking. Dawnkit's pelt grew hot and she flattened her ears.

Turtlekit pushed past Dawnkit after Willowkit. *I can't be scared. I'm a warrior!* Dawnkit dashed after her two littermates, determined to prove she was just as brave as them. Willowkit led them to an ear behind the warriors den the ground was raised up behind the den. The three littermates ran up the incline and at the top was a bush with lightly covered leaves and was decorated with bright red berries. A tree grew over the top, that plus the warriors den and the wall of the camp made it almost like a den.

"Woah, this is so cool!' Turltekit exclaimed. "How did you find out about it?"

Willowkit puffed out her chest. "I heard Lionpaw talking about it."

Dawnkit looked around, she had to admit, it was a pretty cool place.

"This is our own camp!" Willowkit exclaimed. "And since I found it..." Her eyes sparkled. "I am the leader, Willowstar of BerryClan!" She beamed, Dawnkit suppressed a laugh. "You are my faithful deputy, Turtleclaw!" She touched her nose to Turtlekit's.

"What am I?" Dawnkit asked, feeling somewhat left out.

Willowkit looked at Dawnkit, narrowing her eyes. "The medicine cat."

Anger burned in Dawnkit's chest, she took a step closer to willowkit. "What makes you so great that you get to be leader?" She said boldly. Willowkit seemed a bit surprised by this, but collected herself quickly. She stood over Dawnkit.

"I'm bigger, stronger and braver than the both of you."

Dawnkit was tired of backing down to her sister. "The only thing big about you is your ego." Willowkit's eyes blazed. "If you're as brave as you think you are, then you'll prove it." Dawnkit challenged.

"How?" Willowkit demanded. Dawnkit could hear Willowkit's confidence slipping. She looked around, looking for something for Willowkit to do. Then, she thought of it.

"Eat those berries." Dawnkit flicked her tail to bright red berries.

"What will that prove." Willowkit spat. "They're *berries*."

"Then it shouldn't be hard." Dawnkit sneered. It was written clear as the sky that Willowkit was scared. "It you're too scared,,," Dawnkit taunted.

"I'm not scared!" Willowkit hissed and moved towards the bush, using her claw to detach one of the berries. After hesitating a moment, Willowkit lowered her head and swallowed the berry.

"Yech!" She spat. "That was so gro--" Willowkit was cut off by a bout of coughing. She attempted to speak again, but she coughed again and began shaking.

"Willowkit?" Turtlekit mewed nervously. Again Willowkit tried to speak, but coughed instead. Her eyes were wide with fear and pain. At the sight of her expression, Turtlekit began yowling for help. Dawnkit stood in horror as she watched Willowkit's body spasm with coughs.

"What's going on?" Turtlekit and Dawnkit turned to see the cream and black fur of Poppyfur. The medicine cat's eyes went to Willowkit.

"Willowkit ate those berries." Dawnkit explained, her voice trembling. Poppyfur's eyes widened.

"Those are deathberries!" Dawnkit's blood went bold. *Deathberries?* Poppyfur moved forward, grasping Willowkit's scrugg in her teeth. "Turtlekit go get your mother. Dawnkit, follow me." Poppyfur commanded, she turned and started dashing across the camp to her den. Dawnkit ran after Poppyfur, her heart pounding in her chest. *Please don't die, Willowkit!*

Inside the medicine den was the heavy scent of herbs and several nests. Poppyfur set Willowkit down in one of them.

"Will she be okay?" Dawnkit asked, her voice cracking. Poppyfur's troubled gaze and no response made dread cripple Dawnkit's heart. She glanced at Willowkit, she had stopped the violent coughing but she whimpered painfully and struggled to breathe.

This is my fault. Dawnkit's heart twisted with guilt. *This is my fault.* Poppyfur rushed to the back of her den and returned with an herb.

"Dawnkit, lay by her, comfort her." Poppyfur commanded. Dawnkit instantly obeyed, climbing into the nest with her sister, pressing her pelt against Willowkit's. Poppyfur forced the herb into Willowkit's mouth and a moment later she vomited. Dawnkit let out an alarmed yelp, but Poppyfur assured her by saying: "It's supposed to do that, she needs to get the toxins out of her system."

"Poppyfur" Dawnkit heard Windflight's cry as the she-cat burst in. "Oh my precious kit!" She cried and started moving towards Willowkit.

"Get back!' Poppyfur hissed. "I need space!"

"That's my kit!" Windflight hissed back.

"She's my patient right now so do what I say!" She looked past Windflight. "Blazeheart, keep her and Turtlekit back. I need Dawnkit with me."

Dawnkit hadn't noticed her father there, but he obeyed the medicine cat. Beside Dawnkit, Willowkit let out a slight cough and lifted her head slowly. "Dawnkit..." She croaked her sister's name.

"Willowkit!" Dawnkit cried. "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!"

Willowkit let out a slight hush. "You were right...I was scared...but now...you need to be leader."

"No!" Dawnkit wailed. "We're gonna be warriors and you're gonna be leader!"

Willowkit's eyes started closing. "Promise me you'll be leader...."

"Willowkit..." Dawnkit whimpered.

"Promise..."

"I promise!" At Dawnkit's words, Willowkit's head fell gently into her nest.

"Willowkit!" Dawnkit cried her sister's name, she felt her sister's pelt cease to rise. "No..." She whimpered. Dawnkit suddenly felt herself be lifted from the nest, it was Blazeheart. She couldn't speak, all she could do was take a final glance at her sister's dead body. She was taken to the nursery, but only one thought went through her head: She was a murderer.

[image]

Chapter 2

The sun was shining bright in the clear blue sky. No clouds covered it's vast appearance, just the sun. SunClan's camp was covered by the beautiful glow of the sun, bringing energy to almost every cat in the Clan. That energy didn't reach the nursery, where Dawnkit sat in the shadows. She hung her head low, trying to fight back the storm of thoughts that clawed at her mind.

"Dawnkit." Dawnkit lifted her head with a jump, she saw her mother standing a few lengths away from her. Her green eyes were filled with so many emotions, joy and pride, but there was a hanging shadow grief and sorrow. "It's time, you don't want to keep the Clan waiting." Dawnkit reluctantly stood up, she couldn't shake the sadness that clung to her pelt. Windflight rasped her tongue over Dawnkit's ears, pulling her close. "Don't feel so down, today is a proud day." Dawnkit choked back crying out in sadness. "Willowkit will be happy you're becoming an apprentice today."

Willowkit's dying face flashed in Dawnkit's mind, something she hadn't been able to get rid of since the day her sister died. *Promise me you'll be leader.* Willowkit's words echoed in her mind. Dawnkit looked up at Windflight. "Willowkit should be out there with us." Dawnkit's voice was quiet, only her mother could hear the pain in her mew.

"Yes, she should..." Windflight let out a quiet sigh. "But, Willowkit is here with you, always. She may not become an apprentice or warrior, but she'll always be with us. I promise." Dawnkit looked at her mother once more, before swallowing her pain and mustering up the courage to leave the nursery, something she hadn't done since Willowkit's death.

At the nursery entrance sat Turtlekit, his green eyes were cast towards the ground. Even from where she stood, Dawnkit could see the sadness in them. Dawnkit approached her brother. "Are you ready?" She couldn't force herself to sound excited.

Turtlekit met her gaze and gave a quick nod, after a moment a small laugh escaped him. "Come on, we can't be sad about this. Willowkit would want us to be happy today, we have to be the best apprentices we can be. For her."

For the first time in a while, Dawnkit felt her spirits lift. She helf her brother's gaze. "For her." She echoed and the two of them stepped out of the nursery into the sunlight. SunClan was already starting to gather, and Dawnkit's eyes looked towards the SunTree where SunClan's leader sat.

Flowerstar sat tall over the Clan, the sunlight shimmering on her gray pelt. When she spotted the two kits, she opened her mouth. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Her call rang out through the trees, sending chills down Dawnkit's spine. Nerves crept up her body, but she forced them down. *For Willowkit.* She told herself and pushed forward. Turtlekit was by her side and she could feel Windflight walking behind them.

Dawnkit gazed into the crowd where she saw Blazeheart sitting proudly near the front, his amber eyes shining bright. Dawnkit felt a warmth from her father as he watched them, he never doubted them for a moment. Dawnkit held her head high and approached the rest of the Clan. Windflight sat beside Blazeheart, their tails intertwining and Dawnkit and Turtlekit made their way to the center of the ground. Tigertail sat at the base of the SunTree as Flowerstar looked down at them, her green eyes intense, but also calming and welcoming.

"Today is a proud day for SunClan," Flowerstar began speaking, Dawnkit could feel Turtlekit tense beside her. "By naming apprentices we show that SunClan will remain strong." Flowerstar's gaze focused in on them. "Turtlekit and Dawnkit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. Turtlekit," Turtlekit stiffened and looked up at the leader. "From this day forward until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Turtlepaw. Your mentor will be Rainears," From the crowd stepped Rainears, a she-cat with shiny black fur and white ears. Her blue eyes sparkled. "Rainears, I know you are ready to take on an apprentice for you have shown yourself to be patience

yet strong, I trust that you will pass on all you known to young Turtlepaw." Rainears stepped forward and faced Turtlepaw, the two of them touched noses and then returned to the crowd, leaving Dawnkit alone.

"Dawnkit, from this day forward until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Dawnpaw. Your mentor will be Sunstream," From the crowd stepped a golden she-cat, Sunstream. Her green eyes were warm and gentle. "Sunstream, you are an intelligent and brave young cat and I trust that you will teach all you know to Dawnpaw."

Dawnpaw faced her new mentor, she felt a welcoming glow from Sunstream and also felt comforted by the she-cat. She leaned forward and carefully touched her nose to Sunstream's. The two of them stepped back, she could see joy and hope in Sunstream's eyes.

"Turtlepaw! Dawnpaw! Turtlepaw! Dawnpaw!" The cats of SunClan cheered, filling Dawnpaw with joy and hope. She noticed her brother padding over to her, a new life filled his green eyes.

"We're apprentices now!" He exclaimed, ears twitching with excitement, and Dawnpaw couldn't help but feel the same excitement.

"And we're not going to waste a moment of it." Rainears meowed, flicking her tail over Turtlepaw's ears. "We're going to start your apprenticeship with a tour of the territory." Turtlepaw seemed to nearly jump out of his fur, Dawnpaw let out a purr of happiness. It had been so long since she had seen her brother filled with such joy. When Rainears and Turtlepaw stepped away from Sunstream and Dawnpaw, Dawnpaw turned to her new mentor.

"What are we going to be doing? Are we doing a territory tour as well?" She questioned, hoping to see the outside of camp. See all that SunClan's territory had to offer.

"Not today," Sunstream purred. "We're doing something else..." She started walking away from the SunTree. "It may not be as exciting as other apprentice tasks, but you need to know it."

Dawnpaw tilted her head. "Well, what are we doing?" She looked at Sunstream expectantly, wondering what they could possibly be doing.

"We're going to be collecting moss." Sunstream's tone was direct and Dawnpaw felt her spirit fall slightly.

"Collecting moss?" Dawnpaw replied with a dry tone, she didn't want to sound ungrateful, but it wasn't something she really wanted to do.

"I know it sounds boring, but it's very important to the Clan." Sunstream mewed. "And when we have good apprentices who can collect moss properly, then we have happy elders, kits and a happy medicine cat. You don't want Poppyfur to be mad at you."

Dawnpaw thought of the medicine cat, Poppyfur. The only memory she had of the she-cat was when Willowkit died, her shouting and telling Dawnpaw to comfort her. Dawnpaw forced the thought away and focused on her mentor. "Well, I'm eager to do anything."

Sunstream let out a purr. "I'm glad to hear it."

"Dawnpaw!" She heard a shout and stopped in her tracks, she saw Lionpaw bounding up to her with excitement in his amber eyes. "You're finally an apprentice!" His welcome was intense, Dawnpaw took a step back. When Lionpaw was still a kit, he always seemed to get along with Willowkit more than her, he was much more like her than Dawnpaw. "And how cool is it that my mother is your mentor." He held his head high as if it that somehow made him seem cooler.

Sunstream let out a snort. "Where exactly is *your* mentor?" She questioned her son, Lionpaw stepped back and looked around bashfully.

"Well, I haven't seen him today." Lionpaw replied, shuffling his paws and looking up cheekily at his mother.

"It's sunhigh," Sunstream pointed out. "What exactly have you been doing?" When Lionpaw didn't respond she let out a sigh. "Well, since you're not busy why don't you see if Poppyfur could borrow

your paws to remove the ticks off the elders."

Lionpaw flattened his ears, he looked crushed. "But, I could go hunting with Rustpelt!" He argued.

"Don't argue with me, Lionpaw." Her tone wasn't harsh, but it was certainly stern. "I may not be your mentor, but I'm sure I could tell Rustpelt that the elder's ticks need taken care of, I don't think he would argue, do you?"

Lionpaw's head drooped. "No, he wouldn't." With a heavy sigh, Lionpaw pushed past Sunstream and Dawnpaw. "I'll see you later, Dawnpaw." With that, he moved quickly towards the medicine cat den. Dawnpaw looked over her shoulder at him, wondering if he would be okay.

Sunstream let out a laugh. "Arrogant little furball..." She muttered, presumably to herself. "Let's go Dawnpaw." She added, louder. Dawnpaw followed Sunstream as she padded towards the back of the camp near the medicine cat den. There was an incline that led out of the camp, covered by long grass. Dawnpaw walked up the incline and in a moment, the two of them were outside of the camp.

As Dawnpaw stepped into the forest, she felt a feeling of home surround her, engulfing her in a cloud of safety and security, this forest was her home, she could feel it and she hadn't even seen it yet. "Where do we go to collect moss?" Dawnpaw asked her mentor, looking around the forest. The trees towered over them, and the grass was lush and soft underneath her paws.

"The moss hollow, it's not far from here." Sunstream replied, and turned off the path they were following and pushed through some bushes. Dawnpaw followed, avoiding getting poked in the eye by a branch and looked at what was on the other side.

A large, stone hollow was before them, with an incline leading down into its bottom. The walls of this hollow were covered in moss, some parts thinner than others. Sunstream guided Dawnpaw down the incline and into the bottom of the hollow. The moss beneath their paws was old and hard, Dawnpaw assumed it was from cats constantly walking on it. Sunstream approached the walls

and sat down, Dawnpaw copied her and sat beside her mentor.

"I know that collecting moss seems like a boring, meaningless chore for a young apprentice," Sunstream began. "But it can be helpful in a number of ways."

Dawnpaw looked at the moss growing up the walls, how could this be so helpful? She looked back to her mentor, hoping for an answer.

"Moss is used for our nests, it's also used by Poppyfur to help treat wounds and give water to sick cats. Collecting moss, however." Sunstream placed one forepaw on the mossy wall, Dawnpaw could see the glint of Sunstream's claws as she extending them slightly. "It can also train your paws to be precise and gentle." Sunstream slowly moved her paw down the wall, when she finished a small piece of moss fell to the ground. "When you do it like, then you leave behind any dirt or stones. " Dawnpaw inspected the piece of moss that Sunstream had collected, and as Sunstream said: it was clean. "Why don't you try?"

Dawnpaw gave a quick nod, then placed her own paw on the wall of moss. She began dragging her claws down the wall, taking the moss with them. She felt her claw get caught on the stone wall but quickly correct it. When she was finished, the piece of moss was even smaller than Sunstream's and seemed a bit ragged.

"Not bad." Sunstream praised. "With patience, you'll have more than enough moss for the Clan." Dawnpaw felt somewhat better about her little piece of moss, and began collecting more.

"This was always one of the more peaceful tasks," Sunstream spoke as she too began collecting more moss. "Sometimes I would just come collect moss when I needed some peace, you almost never find the other apprentices here unless they have to be." She laughed.

"I'm sure Lionpaw isn't the biggest fan of collecting moss?" Dawnpaw mewed, with a slight laugh in her voice. She couldn't imagine the boastful apprentice sitting still for more than a heartbeat.

"Lionpaw especially hates it," Sunstream mewed in reply, her green eyes sparkling. "He's all about the hunting and fighting, which is understandable. He, like most apprentices, think that being a warrior is only fighting and hunting. In reality, we spend more time doing things like collecting moss than fighting. Hunting we do every day, yes, but they fail to see the importance of having patience and a steady paw." Sunstream looked down at Dawnpaw, her green eyes steady. "Would you tear moss off this wall without a care in the world? Just start slashing your claws at it?"

Dawnpaw shook her head, remembering how she got her claw caught in the wall. "No, you could hurt yourself that way, and the moss wouldn't be very good."

"Exactly." Sunstream purred. "If you went into battle swinging your claws without thinking, you would get hurt pretty easily, and if you went hunting without any practice or patience then your prey would be messy and ruined." She looked at the two balls of moss forming at the she-cat's paws. "But with time and practice, fighting and hunting can be done cleanly and precisely."

Dawnpaw nodded, listening to Sunstream's words carefully. What the she-cat was saying made a lot of sense to her, there was more to being a warrior than fighting. "Lionpaw is good at what he does," Dawnpaw looked back up at her mentor as she continued talking. "But his ego gets in the way a lot." Sunstream sighed slightly. "He thinks because of his family, that he's somehow better than his fellow apprentices."

"His family?" Dawnpaw echoed.

Sunstream nodded. "His father is deputy, his grandfather is a well-respected warrior and his aunt was one of the best medicine cats in the forest."

Dawnpaw tilted her head a bit, his aunt? She knew that Poppyfur wasn't his aunt. "Who was his aunt?"

Sunstream's eyes glowed softly they showed remnants of love and sadness. "My sister, Honeywing. She was the medicine cat before Poppyfur." Sunstream continued clawing moss of the wall. "I always

said that StarClan guided her paws from the nursery to the medicine cat den, she always knew she wanted to be a medicine cat, and she was a wonderful medicine cat. She cared so much for each and every cat she met, regardless of their Clan." Dawnpaw could see the love in Sunstream's eyes, the admiration. "Unfortunately," Sunstream's gaze darkened slightly. "That sometimes got her in trouble. Honeywing believed that as a medicine cat, her duty was to the forest and to the StarClan, which sometimes brought her to push the borders of the other Clans. If there was sickness in MoonClan, she would be over there to try and help. She meant well, but most of the time the other leaders didn't appreciate it.

"Ultimately, that led to her death." Sunstream looked at her paws. "LichenClan was attacking, and Honeywing and Poppyfur didn't have an herb they needed. When Honeywing ran out to go find some, she stumbled across an injured LichenClan cat and stayed to help. When she didn't return quickly, Poppyfur went to find her and found that she had been killed by a LichenClan warrior who mistook her for a warrior attacking the injured cat.

"The entire forest mourned the death of Honeywing, but deep down we all knew that she died doing what she loved and that she's happy serving all the Clans in StarClan." Sunstream looked up towards the sky, the sun was still shining bright and the stars were nowhere in sight, but Dawnpaw knew that Sunstream was looking for Honeywing. Dawnpaw looked at the gentle glow in Sunstream's eyes, she had lost her sister too. The thought of Willowkit dropped Dawnpaw's spirit, she looked away from her mentor and stared at her paws.

"I know how it feels to lose a sister, Dawnpaw." Sunstream said, Dawnpaw could tell she was no longer looking at the sky, but at her. "That's why I asked Flowerstar to be your mentor, because I knew I could help you understand your grief."

Dawnpaw looked up in surprise at her mentor. "You *asked* to be my mentor?" She questioned.

Sunstream nodded. "Our situations are a bit different, you lost your sister at such a young age, it's not easy to handle even as a fully

grown warrior." Dawnpaw flattened her ears, looking at the ground. "But no matter what, it does get better with time." Sunstream rested her tail on Dawnpaw's shoulders. "As long as you remember Willowkit for who she was, you'll never lose her."

Who Willowkit was... Dawnpaw's thoughts wandered back to the days before Willowkit's death. Willowkit was loud, energetic and pretty arrogant. She was rough, and even a little mean sometimes, but she was so brave. Dawnpaw's heart warmed at the thought of playing with her sister, Willowkit was fierce, and she was playful. She never gave up on her littermates, she only pushed them to be better. Dawnpaw looked up at Sunstream, keeping those thoughts of Willowkit strong in her mind. "Thank you, Sunstream. I'll never forget who Willowkit was."

Sunstream and Dawnpaw spent quite a long time sitting in the moss hollow, collecting moss and talking about their sisters, though Sunstream had many more stories to tell. Dawnpaw enjoyed the story of when Sunstream and Honeywing were apprentices and Sunstream fell in the patch of wild garlic they had been looking for, and she reeked of garlic for days. Dawnpaw told her the story of when she, Willowkit and Turtlepaw were playing with a ball of moss and Willowkit got her tail stuck on the bramble wall of the nursery.

When the two decided to go back to camp, they had a large bundle of moss to carry and not enough mouth to talk. They walked back through the forest quietly, but Dawnpaw felt comfortable around her new mentor. She was incredibly grateful that she had Sunstream as a mentor, she was caring and she was incredibly smart.

Sunstream and Dawnpaw reached the camp just as dusk was approaching, casting long shadows into the camp. Most of SunClan was returning from their daily duties as well, she spotted Tigertail returning from the last patrol of the day and on his way to Flowerstar to give her the report. Dawnpaw couldn't wait for her first patrol, or her first day of hunting. She was more than excited to begin her life an apprentice.

"Why don't you drop that prey off at Poppyfur's den and get

something to eat, you'll need to talk to your new denmates." Sunstream purred and then padded deeper into camp towards the direction that Tigertail had went. Dawnpaw did what she said, and began padding towards the medicine den.

As she grew closer, memories flashed in her mind of the last time she had been in this den. She suppressed those memories and summoned all of her courage to enter the medicine cat den. Inside, she was greeted with the strong scent of herbs, something she hadn't particularly been paying attention to the first time. Poppyfur was near the back of the den, moving some leaves into a crack in the back of the wall, she turned around when she heard the shuffling of Dawnpaw's movement.

Poppyfur looked at her with curious green eyes. "First day moss gathering?" She questioned. Dawnpaw nodded and set down the moss. Poppyfur padded closer, giving the moss a sniff. "I see Sunstream is going to be a fine mentor, hopefully she teaches you to be a bit more studious than some other apprentices."

Dawnpaw awkwardly nodded. "She's been good to me so far," She turned away. "Enjoy the moss." She said, then quickly padded out of the den. Something about Poppyfur's gaze made Dawnpaw feel uncomfortable, she just wanted to settle down for the night and see her new denmates.

Dawnpaw grabbed a mouse on her way to the apprentice den, wondering if Turtlepaw had eaten yet. The apprentice den wasn't far from the warrior's den, it was an old burrow underneath a tree, protected by the roots of the tree. Sitting outside was the SunClan apprentices, including Turtlepaw. As she got closer she could make out the names and faces of the others. Lionpaw sat close with his sister Goldenpaw, who shared the same golden pelt as him. Though, her's seem somewhat lighter. Beside them sat Adderpaw, a gray tom whose fur was marked with lighter tabby stripes. Next to Adderpaw sat a very annoyed looking she-cat named Fawnpaw, who had short light brown fur. Finally there was Redpaw, a ginger tom with amber eyes and his identical sister Squirrelpaw. The only difference looks were her green eyes and white tipped tail.

"Dawnpaw!" Turtlepaw greeted cheerfully, sitting up. "You're finally

back." Dawnpaw let out a purr, seeing her brother so happy and she moved quickly to sit beside him.

"Did you eat yet?" She questioned, setting down her mouse and noticed that he also had a mouse at his paws.

"I was waiting for you." Turtlepaw nudged her and took a bite of his fresh-kill, Dawnpaw quickly did the same."

"How was your first day as an apprentice, Dawnpaw?" Goldenpaw asked kindly as she shared a squirrel with her brother.

"Our mother didn't make you do something too boring did she? I have a feeling she would." Lionpaw added, his amber eyes sparkling curiously.

Dawnpaw laughed slightly. "She took me to collect moss, but I enjoyed it." She replied, and Lionpaw shook his head, but she could see the playfulness written on his face.

"You're one of *those* apprentices?" Fawnpaw snorted with a twitch of her tail.

"Don't mind her." Adderpaw mewed with a slight laugh, casting a glance at Fawnpaw. "She has a perpetual tick on her shoulder."

Fawnpaw spat at him, then stood up. "I'm going to bed," She replied. "This den is getting crowded, so keep your paws to yourselves tonight." She added and with a final flick of her tail, she vanished into the den.

Redpaw shook his head. "Don't mind her." He added, sharing an amused look with his sister. "She always throws a fit when new apprentices show up."

"That's only because Lionpaw kicked her in his sleep when he first moved into the den." Squirrelpaw added with a laugh.

"It wasn't my fault!" Lionpaw stuck his nose in the air. "She was too close to my nest, it's not my fault I'm such a big cat!"

The group of apprentices shared a laugh at Lionpaw's expense, but

Dawnpaw could tell he wasn't bothered by it, it would take more than a few playful jokes to damage his ego. "We went ahead and made some nests for you near the front of the den," Squirrelpaw mewed. "Feel free to make yourselves at home." With that, Squirrelpaw and Redpaw also slipped into the apprentice den, just as the sun was beginning to fall.

"It's going to be nice not being the youngest apprentices again." Goldenpaw mewed, looking at Turtlepaw and Dawnpaw. "We're only a few moons older than you, but it makes us feel a little bit bigger."

Lionpaw stood up and walked around to Dawnpaw and Turtlepaw, pressing against them. "If you ever need help or guidance from us senior apprentices," He mewed, his tone lined with confidence but also a hint of teasing. "Don't hesitate to ask."

"I'll be sure to do that," Turtlepaw mewed, shoving Lionpaw away while Dawnpaw laughed quietly. Lionpaw regained his balance quickly. "When mice fly."

Lionpaw faked-limped back to his sister. "So hurtful, Turtlepaw, didn't your mother teach you to respect your elders."

"Then maybe you should go live in the elder's den, seeing you're about as useful as them." Turtlepaw sneered, whipping his tail playfully.

"Not until I become the greatest warrior this forest has ever seen." Lionpaw puffed out his chest. As much as Dawnpaw enjoyed this display of her brother and Lionpaw, she was feeling the pull of sleep from her exhausting day.

"I'll be looking forward to that day," Dawnpaw said, standing up. "But for now, this particular apprentice needs to sleep.

Turtlepaw shook his head playfully and stood up with her. "I'll join you, it's been a busy day." The two left Goldenpaw, Adderpaw and Lionpaw to talk and Dawnpaw stepped into the apprentice den.

It had a different feel than the nursery, there was no scent of kits or

milk, just the scent of moss and her fellow apprentices. It felt strange as she climbed into the nest that the other apprentices had built for her. As she curled up into her nest, she found herself longing for the scent of Windflight, for the scent of Willowkit, but she never did lose the scent of Turtlepaw. She breathed in the scent of her brother, and the scent of her Clanmates.

After a while, it did soothe her and Dawnpaw soon fell into a deep sleep, thinking of Turtlepaw and Willowkit

Chapter 3

Dawnpaw prepared herself to pounce, digging her claws into the earth underneath her paws. Something felt off her position, but she kept going. When Dawnpaw lept forward, she nearly slipped on the grass. Her front paws hit the ground clumsily, but she couldn't see her "prey" which was a large leaf. A feeling of accomplishment warmed over her, until she lifted her paws and noticed that she hadn't caught the leaf, she had only moved it farther away.

Dawnpaw let out a sigh and stood up, looking towards Sunstream who watched with interest. "Was I close at least?" She asked, feeling defeated.

"Yes, you were." Sunstream purred, the golden she-cat stood up and moved to Dawnpaw's side. "But you're rushing the pounce, and your crouch is uneven." Sunstream dropped into the hunter's crouch. "You need to keep your body tight and closed off, putting your strength into your jump, not your front paws. When you're getting ready to pounce, you need to keep your body as low to the ground as possible." Dawnpaw watched as Sunstream flattened herself against the ground, getting on level with the grass.

Dawnpaw copied her mentor, trying to press herself as close to the ground as possible, she could feel the ground just under her belly. When she looked at Sunstream for approval she just saw her mentor letting out a small laugh. "You want to crouch, not lay day." Sunstream stood in front of her, pushing Dawnpaw's paws closer to her chest. "Tuck your front paws in closer, and bring in your hind legs."

Dawnpaw followed her advice, bringing in her paws. This pose felt more comfortable than her last one. With a deep breath, Dawnpaw pounced once more. He paws landed a bit more stable on the ground, and on top of her leaf. She looked up at Sunstream with bright eyes, feeling accomplished, even if it was just a leaf.

"Not bad," Sunstream purred. "Tomorrow we'll try with some actual prey." She replied, her green eyes soft.

Dawnpaw's head fell, feeling disappointed. "Tomorrow? Why not today?"

Sunstream brushed her tail across Dawnpaw's flank. "Because we've been working at this for a while, now." She replied. "We'll start bright and early tomorrow, and spend the day hunting."

Dawnpaw's ears drooped, she stood up and began following her mentor back to camp. Dawnpaw had been apprentice for a little over a moon now and she still struggled with hunting. She hadn't caught a single piece of living prey yet, and she was starting to feel a little useless. Now that she actually managed to get the hunting crouch down, she wanted to try hunting real prey, she wanted to prove that she could. Even Turtlepaw was bring back prey, and she was only catching leaves.

Feeling like a disappointment, she entered camp as the sun was starting to fall. "Don't forget, Dawnpaw." Sunstream mewed. "Bright and early tomorrow." She purred and padded away to find Tigertail, Dawnpaw looked at her paws and padded over to the apprentice den. Outside, Lionpaw, Goldenpaw and much to her dismay, Fawnpaw were sitting around the entrance. Lionpaw and Goldenpaw were sharing a squirrel, but Dawnpaw didn't feel like eating if she couldn't provide prey herself.

"Hey, Dawnpaw!" Lionpaw called when she got closer, his amber eyes bright. "How was the training today?"

Dawnpaw approached the other apprentices, avoided their gazes. "It went...alright. Sunstream is a good mentor."

"Still haven't caught any prey?" Fawnpaw said, her tone as sharp as her claws, and cutting into any confidence Dawnpaw had left. She hung her head low and avoided Fawnpaw's judgmental stare.

"Don't be rude, Fawnpaw." Lionpaw spoke up, Dawnpaw looked up and saw the golden apprentice facing Fawnpaw.

"I was just pointing out a fact." Fawnpaw stuck her muzzle in the air. "She's been an apprentice for over a moon, she should be able to catch a piece of prey by now. Didn't you catch a piece of prey your first day out?" Dawnpaw flattened her ears.

"She's not me." Lionpaw's tone was stern. "She's trying her best, and if you were any kind of a decent Clanmate you'd be helping instead criticizing." Fawnpaw stood up, facing Lionpaw head on with anger sparking in her green eyes. "And I don't exactly you see being the perfect apprentice either, remember when you started your apprenticeship and followed that mouse directly into a tree?"

Fawnpaw flattened her ears, the fur along her spine rising. "Whatever!" She hissed and spun around on her paws. "I have better things to do than sit here and listen to you!" With a lash of her tail, Fawnpaw quickly padded away towards her father, Bramblepelt.

Lionpaw snorted. "Stuck-up she-cat." He shook his head then looked towards, Dawnpaw, his amber eyes soft. "Are you alright? She doesn't understand the meaning of 'kindness'."

Dawnpaw nodded, she avoided his gaze. She had seen Lionpaw as an arrogant, self-centered cat, and yet he had just stood up for her. She looked back at him once more, his eyes brimmed with kindness. She felt a warm feeling, and suddenly had a different attitude towards him. "Yeah, I'm alright." She purred.

"And don't worry about hunting," Lionpaw nudged her. "If you're still struggling, feel free to ask me for help." His eyes glinted with confidence and Dawnpaw let out a laugh. He was still arrogant, but that didn't mean he wasn't kind.

"Thank you, Lionpaw." She replied, then looked at her paws. She heard pawsteps behind her and looked over her shoulder to see Turtlepaw padding towards them, she greeted her brother with a nod. "How was training?" She asked.

Turtlepaw sat down beside Dawnpaw, resting his tail over his paws. "It was fun, I did some battle training." Dawnpaw felt a sliver of doubt crawl into her chest, she hadn't started battle training yet. Sunstream had her focused on hunting, she knew she was behind on

her apprentice training. Dawnpaw did her best to swallow her feelings of self-doubt, but they still clawed at her chest.

Dawnpaw looked around camp, the sun was setting and SunClan was starting to settle down. Rainears, Crowfur, Applespots, and Sandfoot were all talking around the drinking pool with pieces of prey, Thornpelt was talking with Tigertail and Bramblepelt while Fawnpaw sat beside her father. Hawktalon and Nightwing were sharing tongues outside the elder's den and outside the nursery, Willownose was sunning herself while Dovetail watched her three kits, Yarrowkit, Cinderkit and Pebblekit play in camp. The three kits were soon to be apprentices, they were about four moons old.

A loud screech pulled Dawnpaw's gaze away from the kits, she looked up towards the sky where she heard it. Soaring in the fading sky, was a large bird circling the camp. A feeling of dread washed over Dawnpaw as she watched the creature fly.

"Eagle!" Dawnpaw heard Tigertail cry. "Every cat get down, stay in groups!" He commanded. Dawnpaw listened, along with her fellow apprentices they moved towards the apprentice den and bunched together.

"Come here, kits!" Dawnpaw heard Dovetail's frantic cry and she looked back towards the nursery. Yarrowkit, Cinderkit and Pebblekit trying to run back to their mother. Pebblekit, however was falling behind her littermates. Dawnpaw watched, digging her claws into the ground and waiting for Pebblekit to reach her mother.

Dawnpaw and the rest of SunClan watched in horror as Pebblekit stumbled over her clumsy paws and fell even more behind her siblings who were practically safe. Dawnpaw heard another screech and looked up to see the eagle diving down into SunClan's camp, faster than any cat could run. The bird's shadow covered Pebblekit who let out a cry of fear.

Save her! Dawnpaw heard a frantic voice speak in her ear, a voice she hadn't heard before. Dawnpaw didn't look to see who it was, she felt a fire light in her heart and a brand new energy spark in her paws. Dawnpaw jumped to her paws and sprinted out to the center

of the camp.

"Dawnpaw!" She heard her brother's cry, but ignored it. Dawnpaw summoned all of her speed into her speed towards Pebblekit. She watched in horror as the eagle reached Pebblekit, picking up the wailing kit with one claw. Gathering all of her strength and courage, Dawnpaw closed her eyes and jumped.

She felt her body hit the eagle and she dug her claws into its body. He grip weak was grip and she felt her claws falter. The eagle cried out, and struggled under Dawnpaw's grip. Blood roared in her ears, she heard a cry from Pebblekit in the distance. Pain shoot through Dawnpaw's shoulder as she felt large talons pierce her fur and skin.

Dawnpaw heard another voice and noticed another cat out of the corner of her eye. With a flash of golden-brown fur and another, pained screech from the eagle, Dawnpaw fell to the ground. Pain engulfed Dawnpaw's entire body, she lifted her head and opened her eyes, the pain blurring her vision. There was a lump of white and gray fur on the ground, covered in splotches of blood. *Pebblekit!*

Dawnpaw looked up, she could see the eagle flying away from the SunClan camp. A cat stepped in front of Dawnpaw, she glanced up to see the panicked face of Blazeheart.

"Dawnpaw? Are you alright?" Her father questioned. Dawnpaw opened her mouth to reply, but a surge of pain spread of her body. The pain was too much for her to handle, Dawnpaw closed her eyes and fell into darkness.

"One panicked mother at a time, please!" Dawnpaw's ear twitched as she heard a semi-annoyed Poppyfur mew.

"Please, Poppyfur." Dawnpaw now heard the mew of Dovetail. "I've already lost so many kits, please let me see her!"

"And it's been only been a few moons since Willowkit died, and you didn't let me see her either!" Windflight added.

Willowkit. Dawnpaw remembered her sister, suddenly the smell of herbs washed over Dawnpaw. She was in the medicine cat den, was

she dying? Dawnpaw couldn't leave her parents, or her brother. With a wince, Dawnpaw forced her eyes open. She was in the medicine cat den, in a soft nest made of moss.

Next to her own was a smaller nest, inside was Pebblekit. She wasn't moving, but Dawnpaw could see the slow rise and fall of her chest. Dawnpaw noticed that Pebblekit's face was covered in cobwebs and herbs. Dawnpaw lifted her head and looked towards the entrance of the den where Poppyfur stood facing Dovetail and Windflight.

Dawnpaw caught her mother's gaze and Windflight shoved her way past Poppyfur who responded with a hiss. "Dawnpaw!" Windflight cried and the brown she-cat practically threw herself down at Dawnpaw's side, nuzzling her. Dawnpaw, however felt comforted by her mother's affection. Dawnpaw closed her eyes and pressed close to Windflight, stopping when she felt a sharp pain in her shoulder.

Dawnpaw looked at her shoulder, which was covered in cobwebs and smelled strongly of herbs, similar to Pebblekit. Poppyfur turned away from Dovetail and gently pushed Windflight away, standing before Dawnpaw. The medicine cat gave Dawnpaw's shoulder a sniff. "How do you feel?" She questioned.

"My shoulder hurts." Dawnpaw replied, looking at her shoulder. How badly was she hurt? Images of the eagle flashed in her mind, she didn't remember the eagle scratching her, just the pain.

"Does it feel hot at all?" Poppyfur gently touched the fur around Dawnpaw's cobweb wrapping.

Dawnpaw shook her head, she could just feel a small burn of pain underneath the cobweb. The medicine cat nodded and faced Windflight. "I told you, she's fine. So far, there's no sign of infection but she'll be staying in here for a bit so I can keep on eye on her. She'll be completely fine, Windflight. You just need to let her rest."

Windflight looked reluctant, but she eventually gave a small nod. "Thank you, Poppyfur." She turned her green gaze onto Dawnpaw. "You get some rest, okay? I'll let your brother and father know

you're okay." Windflight turned away, but Dovetail remained. Her blue eyes filled with pain and fear.

"Dovetail," Poppyfur's voice softened. "I promise I will do my best for Pebblekit, but we can't know what's going to happen until she wakes. I'll watch her and care for her wounds, but you need to let me work. Take care of Yarrowkit and Cinderkit, they're probably just as worried as you are. Pebblekit is in safe paws, and I'll let you know as soon as she wakes up."

Dovetail dropped her head, but turned away. Her tail dragged on the ground behind her, but she didn't speak. Poppyfur let out a sigh and turned away from the entrance. "Thank StarClan they listened." Poppyfur padded across the den to Pebblekit where she gave the small kit a sniff.

"How is she?" Dawnpaw asked, her voice quiet.

Poppyfur looked at Dawnpaw, she could see the exhaustion in the medicine cat's green eyes. "She was hurt pretty badly by the eagle, but she should survive." Poppyfur's voice was unsteady, and she avoided Dawnpaw's gaze. Was she afraid that Pebblekit *wouldn't* survive?

"That was a pretty brave thing you did there." Poppyfur mewed, turning her back on Dawnpaw to dig through her herb store. Dawnpaw looked at her paws, feeling somewhat uncomfortable. "What made you do it? You're lucky your father came along or that eagle probably would've carried you away instead."

"I don't know." Dawnpaw said, looking at the ground. "I just felt like I needed to do something, I didn't want to Pebblekit die without even trying to help her." She looked up to see Poppyfur nodding slowly.

"Well, it's a good thing you did try." Poppyfur glanced towards Pebblekit's nest. "Now both of you get to survive." After a moment of silence, Poppyfur padded over to Dawnpaw and set some seeds down in front of her. "Eat these, they'll ease the pain and help you sleep."

"How bad was I hurt?" Dawnpaw asked, looking at the seeds with uncertainty.

"Bad enough," Poppyfur replied, turning away once more. "You'll be staying in here for a while, and off apprentice duties for even longer."

Dawnpaw flattened her ears, the last thing she needed was to fall even more behind on her apprentice skills. She looked towards Pebblekit's nest, trying to ignore the doubts in her heart. After lapping up the seeds, Dawnpaw rested her chin on her paws, watching the slow rise and fall of Pebblekit's body. At least she was alive, right? Dawnpaw closed her eyes, falling into a quiet, dreamless sleep.

Dawnpaw woke up when she heard Poppyfur talking to someone outside the medicine cat den. She groggily lifted her head, taking a moment to look at Pebblekit. She was still sleeping quietly in her nest. Dawnpaw glanced towards the entrance of the den, trying to make out who Poppyfur was talking to.

"If she's awake then you can come see here, but not for long. Both she and Pebblekit need their rest." Poppyfur stepped into the medicine cat den, looking directly at Dawnpaw, then back outside. "She's awake, you can come in."

Dawnpaw watched as her brother stepped into the medicine cat den, his face lined with worry, only a small glimpse of relief when he saw Dawnpaw. Turtlepaw entered the den and sat beside Dawnpaw's nest. "How do you feel?" His eyes traveled to the herb dressing on Dawnpaw's shoulder.

"I feel fine." Dawnpaw replied, which was the truth. She still felt the slight sting in her shoulder, but it didn't feel any worse.

"I'll be right back," Poppyfur said, getting the attention of the two apprentices. "Keep an eye on Pebblekit for any changes." With that, the medicine cat left the three of them alone.

Dawnpaw looked back towards her brother, his head was hung low and his green eyes were dark. "Are you alright?" She questioned.

Turtlepaw looked up at her. "How could you put yourself in danger like that?" He questioned, staring at Dawnpaw intently.

Dawnpaw leaned back slightly. "I had to, I had to do it for Pebblekit."

Turtlepaw looked down, pain flashing in his eyes. "But why you? Why did *you* have to?" His claws flexed at the ground, he was clearly distressed.

"No other cat was going to." Dawnpaw replied, keeping her tone firm.

"But I'm supposed to protect you!" He looked up at her, eyes wide and desperate. "I lost Willowkit, I can't lose you too, Dawnpaw. When Willowkit died I promised myself I would never let anything happen to you. Yet here you are throwing yourself at eagles!"

"I had to do it, Turtlepaw!" She found herself shouting. "I'm a warrior, this is what I do! Pebblekit is my Clanmate and I had to protect her, why should Yarrowkit and Cinderkit have to go through what we did? It wasn't time for Pebblekit to die and I had to help her! I didn't die and now Pebblekit gets a chance to live her life."

Turtlepaw flattened his ears and sat down, looking defeated. "I'm sorry." He said quietly. "I don't want to lose you, Dawnpaw. You're the only sister I have left."

Dawnpaw reached forward, touching her muzzle to Turtlepaw's cheek. "You won't, I promise." Turtlepaw at her, his eyes grateful and loving.

Beside them, Pebblekit let out a groan and starting shifting her nest. Dawnpaw looked at her, and watched as Pebblekit opened the one eye that wasn't covered by cobweb. "Pebblekit!" Dawnpaw exclaimed and looked at the young cat.

"What happened? Where am I?" Pebblekit looked around in alarm, fear overtaking her gaze.

"You're in the medicine cat den, you were attacked by an eagle."

Dawnpaw replied, trying to calm the kit. "Poppyfur should be back soon."

As Dawnpaw spoke, the medicine cat stepped into the den. "Pebblekit, you're awake." There was a level of shock in Poppyfur's voice. She quickly padded over to the kit and began slowly taking off the cobweb wrapping.

Dawnpaw was shocked at Pebblekit's appearance, her fur was flattened down with herbs but she had claw marks across her face. They weren't large, but they were dangerously close to her eye. One of them was over her muzzle, her nose looked severely damaged.

Poppyfur covered Pebblekit's undamaged eye with a leaf. "Can you see?" She questioned, Pebblekit focused hard, after a moment she nodded.

"Kind of, but it's blurry." She replied, concern in her tiny voice.

"Can you smell anything?" Poppyfur was noticeably forcing her voice to remain steady. Pebblekit sniffed the air, but her ears flattened and shock filled her face.

"No, I can't. Is that bad? Is something wrong?" Pebblekit looked to the medicine cat for answered, but Poppyfur looked away. Dawnpaw shared an uneasy expression with Turtlepaw.

"Pebblekit," Poppyfur looked back towards the kit. "The eagle scratched your face," She took a deep breath. "It damaged your nose, and I'm afraid you've lost your sense of smell."

"What?!" Pebblekit scrambled in her nest. "How can I be a warrior? How can I find prey?" The kit was clearly starting to panic.

"Turtlepaw, would you please go get Dovetail and her kits?" Poppyfur turned to Turtlepaw. "I'm going to try and calm Pebblekit down." Turtlepaw nodded and was gone in a heartbeat, Dawnpaw kept her eyes on Pebblekit.

"Pebblekit," Poppyfur spoke softly. "I promise I will do everything I can to fix this, I may not be permanent."

"What if it is?" Pebblekit replied, her voice cracking.

"Then the Clan will figured something out." Poppyfur replied. "I'm going to redress your wounds, they still need to heal. Your mother and littermates will be here soon." Poppyfur replaced the herbs and cobweb on Pebblekit's face while she remained still and silent.

After a while, Dovetail burst into the medicine cat den, her eyes searching for her kit. Behind her Cinderkit and Yarrowkit bounded over to their sister. "Pebblekit!" Cinderkit cried.

"You're okay!" Yarrowkit practically threw himself into the nest, pressing up against his sister. Cinderkit climbed into the nest as well and cuddled close to her sister.

"Dovetail," Poppyfur mewed, approaching the queen. "Come talk with me outside the den, you can talk with Pebblekit afterwards. Dovetail must've sensed the urgency in Poppyfur's mew because she followed without arguing.

Dawnpaw looked back to the littermates, Pebblekit already seemed to be cheering up at the sight of her siblings. "I'm so glad you're okay!" Yarrowkit said, brushing up against Pebblekit. "What do you remember about it?"

Pebblekit laid down, looking at her littermates. "I just remember the eagle and then everything went dark."

"Well, Dawnpaw saved you!" Cinderkit put in loudly, Pebblekit looked at Dawnpaw with surprise on her face.

"You did?" She questioned, then her blue eye traveled down to Dawnpaw's wounded shoulder.

Before Dawnpaw could speak, Cinderkit replied first. "She did! I was really scared at the time, but looking back it was awesome! She jumped on it and started clawing at it. Then Blazeheart came in and saved her, and it flew off never to be seen again!" Excitement sparkled in Cinderkit's amber eyes, and awe in Pebblekit's.

Dawnpaw heard pawsteps as Poppyfur and Dovetail stepped back into the medicine cat den, Dovetail didn't seem to be too upset from

the news that her daughter may not have a sense of smell. "Thank you so much for helping her Poppyfur. " Dovetail dipped her head at the medicine cat den.

Poppyfur dipped her head in return. "It's my job, taking care of my Clanmates is what keeps me going."

Dovetail then turned to Dawnpaw, her blue eyes soft as heather. "And thank *you* Dawnpaw." She mewed softly. "You saved my kit, and because of you, even if she loses her sense of smell, you gave her a chance to live."

Chapter 4

Sit still, would you?" Poppyfur demanded, and Dawnpaw forced herself to sit still while Poppyfur inspected her shoulder. Impatience and anxiety clawed at her heart, she struggled to keep her paws still. Poppyfur gave her shoulder another stiff then stepped back, narrowing her green eyes at Dawnpaw. Dawnpaw held her breath, waiting for Poppyfur's answer. "Very well, you can go. Just take it easy."

Excitement shot through Dawnpaw like lightning, she jumped to her paws with joy. "Thank you, Poppyfur!" She mewed, and quickly bounded out out of the nursery.

"I said take it easy!" Dawnpaw heard Poppyfur shout with a twinge of anger in her mew, Dawnpaw skidded to a stop and looked sheepishly over her shoulder. It had been over a moon since an eagle attacked Pebblekit and Dawnpaw saved her. Dawnpaw had been stuck in the medicine cat den and unable to participate in any of her apprentice training, it also caused her to miss the last gathering.

This would be the third gathering since Dawnpaw had become an apprentice, the first she missed because Sunstream didn't allow her to go, but now she was finally able to go! Dawnpaw's was eager to meet cats from the other Clans, and travel beyond SunClan's territory. Dawnpaw quickly padded away from the medicine cat den, she spotted her brother standing with his mentor.

She quickly trotted over to him. "Turtlepaw!" She called out. Turtlepaw looked over his shoulder, and called her over.

"What's up?" He questioned when Dawnpaw grew closer.

"Poppyfur told me I'm okay to go to the gathering tonight." She explained, unable to contain the excitement in her voice.

"Really?" Turtlepaw's eyes widened with excitement. "That's great!" This would be Turtlepaw's second gathering, and he had told her about the one he had been to. Dawnpaw couldn't wait to go and expierance it for herself.

"I should go tell Sunstream." Dawnpaw mewed, she turned away from her brother and located her mentor talking with Lionpaw and Goldenpaw. She quickly padded up to her mentor.

Sunstream looked at Dawnpaw when she approached. "Hello there, Dawnpaw." She greeted kindly. "How is your shoulder feeling?" She questioned. Ever since Dawnpaw was injured, Sunstream had visited her in the medicine cat den a few times, promising to help her catch up on her training as quick as possible.

"It's feeling great, actually." Dawnpaw replied, glancing at her shoulder. Her golden-brown fur was parted by several large scars, she hoped in time they would heal and get smaller. The biggest scar on the other apprentices was a knick in Adderpaw's ear, most warriors in SunClan didn't have scars as big as hers. Dawnpaw turned her attention back to Sunstream. "Poppyfur told me I was able to go to the gathering, if that's alright with you."

Sunstream purred. "Of course that's alright, you should've been to the last gathering. I"m glad you get to go this time."

"The gathering is so much fun!" Lionpaw boasted, his amber eyes sparkling. "There's so many other cats and you get to see the other leaders!"

Dawnpaw could feel his excitement, she couldn't wait to see all the other Clan cats. Not just the leaders either, but the deputies, medicine cats and all the other apprentices. She wanted to see how the other Clans acted, if their apprentices and warriors were any different than SunClan's.

Sunstream looked at her son with soft eyes. "Well there is still a bit of time before we leave for the gathering, why don't you two go find something to do until then. Ask your mentors if they need you for anything." She instructed Lionpaw and Goldenpaw. Goldenpaw nodded and quickly padded off towards Sandfoot. Lionpaw,

however, was a bit hesitant but did listen to his mother and went towards Rustpelt who was in the same direction.

Sunstream watched them go and laughed to herself. "Goldenpaw is very clever, she's going to make a great warrior. Lionpaw will too, he's slowly learning to listen."

"He's really nice to his Clanmates." Dawnpaw added, catching Sunstream's attention. She recalled the time Lionpaw stood up for her against Fawnpaw. "He's always been nice to me, ever since I became an apprentice."

Sunstream let out a purr, then looked back as her kits separated into their apprentice duties. "I'm glad to hear that." She sighed quietly. "It's good to know that he does have a sense of humility. I want so bad for him to be an incredible warrior."

"I think he will be." Dawnpaw mewed, thinking of how kind Lionpaw was towards his Clanmates, he may have a big ego but Dawnpaw had a feeling he would protect his Clanmates over himself.

"That's good to hear from you, Dawnpaw." Sunstream rested her tail across Dawnpaw's shoulders. "You're a smart cat, and I know you'll make a wonderful warrior as well." Dawnpaw's pelt burned from Sunstream's compliment, she didn't know how to respond.

"You should rest before we go, I'll come get you before the Clan leaves for the gathering. It's quite a long walk." Sunstream stood up, gave Dawnpaw a final nod before going over to speak with Applespots. Dawnpaw watched her mentor go, then decided that Sunstream was right. She should rest her shoulder before she left, the last thing she needed was to tear open the wound in the middle of the gathering.

She went back to the medicine cat den and poked her head inside, Poppyfur was at Pebblekit's nest. The cobwebs had been taken off of Pebblekit's face, her scars were still very obvious. Dawnpaw stepped into the den and moved to her nest, Poppyfur glanced over her shoulder. "Need something?" She questioned.

Dawnpaw shook her head. "Just resting my shoulder before the gathering." She replied and laid down in her nest, doing her best to make her injured shoulder comfortable. "Are you going to the gathering tonight?" Dawnpaw questioned. Wondering if Poppyfur felt confident enough to leave Pebblekit here while she was away for the night.

Poppyfur nodded. "I didn't go to the last gathering, but I think she'll be okay. I'll have Dovetail and her kits stop by and keep her company for the night." Poppyfur went to her store and grabbed a fresh batch of herbs for Pebblekit. "I'm going to give you some herbs before we leave, Dawnpaw. Just to make sure that you'll have the energy to make it to the gathering hollow. If you feel at all like you're too much pain, let me know and I'll take you back to camp."

Dawnpaw nodded, hoping that would happen, she rested her chin on her paws, waiting for the sun to go down and waiting for her time to go to the gathering.

Dawnpaw sat with her Clan, Flowerstar in the center of her Clanmates as they prepared to leave for the gathering. Beside Dawnpaw sat Sunstream, Turtlepaw, Rainears, Goldenpaw and Lionpaw. Adderpaw was off with his parents, Stormwind and Snakewhisker. The most excited cats seemed to be SunClan's newest warriors, Squirreltail and Redclaw. The two of them had earned their warrior names just a few days ago. Dawnpaw enjoyed watching the ceremony, looking forward to the day when she had her own.

"Are we all ready?" Flowerstar asked, and when the rest of SunClan agreed, she began leading them out of the camp. Dawnpaw stuck close to Sunstream as the Clan moved into SunClan's territory. She eagerly followed the Clan, she had already seen pretty much all of SunClan's territory, but now she was finally seeing beyond it.

She knew the way towards the gathering hollow, but now she would be able to actually see it, and meet so many new cats. She had to refrain from running ahead of her Clanmates, her paws itched to see the hollow. Instead, Dawnpaw stayed beside her mentor as they walked through the forest.

Through the trees Dawnpaw could see the river border, across it was the neutral territory of the Gathering Hollow, where all the Clans would be. Flowerstar was the first to reach it, and the first to cross. Dawnpaw looked at the stepping stones that led to the other side, Flowerstar crossed with grace and ease. Tigertail followed, and the rest of SunClan gradually followed.

As Dawnpaw's turn came up, her nerves grew stronger. She couldn't help but imagine herself slipping on the rocks and falling into the icy river below. Sunstream must have sensed her anxiety because she leaned in close to Dawnpaw. "Don't worry, it's not as bad as it looks." She mewed softly. "Just watch me." When it came to Sunstream's turn to cross, the golden she-cat carefully placed her paws on the shiny stones and crossed with ease.

Dawnpaw swallowed her nerves and pushed herself to go forward, there were only a few warriors behind her and she didn't want to hold them up. She could feel the eyes of her Clanmates on her, she had to cross quickly. Dawnpaw placed one forepaw on the rocks, they were cold on her pads. Praying to StarClan that her shoulder wouldn't give out, Dawnpaw continued across. She watched carefully where she placed each pawstep, and before she knew it she was on the other side of the river.

Sunstream gave her an approving nod as they waited for the rest of their Clanmates to cross. Once the rest of SunClan made it across, they continued into the trees. The trees began thinning out, and Dawnpaw watched as the Gathering Hollow showed up in the distance. Dawnpaw's eyes widened as she saw more cats than she had ever seen in one place.

In the hollow were cats of all different sizes and colors. Several different scents wafted up from the hollow, and four large trees grew out of the back of the hollow, Dawnpaw assumed that's where the four leaders would sit and speak to the Clans.

"When you're talking to cats from other Clans be sure not to tell them everything about SunClan." Sunstream mewed as they padded towards the hollow. "We're under a truce, and you're allowed to make friends but remember that once this gathering is over they are still our rival Clans."

Dawnpaw nodded, wondering if she actually would make any friends here. How friendly were the other Clan cats? SunClan walked down into the hollow, where Dawnpaw could see more and more cats up close and personal. She noticed Lionpaw slip in beside her. "So, you should know who the other leaders are." He mewed, she turned his attention to him. "The AshClan leader is named Lionstar, and his deputy is Echoheart. She's a big cruite of a cat, and kind of rude. The MoonClan leader is Crowstar and the deputy is Hawkface, and finally there's LichenClan. The leader is Jaggedstar, you'll know him when you see him. His deputy is Mossleaf."

Dawnpaw looked around for the other four leaders, but none of the cats stood out as leaders to her, with the exception of Flowerstar. She watched as Flowerstar, Tigertail and Poppyfur all walked towards the trees, she followed them with her eyes and watched them approach more cats. A large, gray tabby she-cat greeted Tigertail and he nodded to a dark gray tabby tom and a brown she-cat. Were those the other deputies?

"Lionpaw!" Dawnpaw heard a voice and turned to see a gray tom cat approaching her and Lionpaw.

"Swiftpaw!" Lionpaw exclaimed and bounded over to the tom cat. "Dawnpaw," He looked over at her. "This is a friend, he's from MoonClan."

"Nice to meet you." Dawnpaw dipped her head kindly at the MoonClan apprentice.

"You too." Swiftpaw purred, then he turned his determined green eyes onto Lionpaw. "We still have to finish our contest from last time."

Lionpaw dropped into a playful crouch. "And I'm so going to win!" He declared and the two tom cats bounded away from Dawnpaw. She wasn't sure what kind of contest the two apprentices were playing, but she hoped they would stay out of trouble. Dawnpaw noticed that Sunstream had left her side and was now talking with a white she-cat Dawnpaw hadn't seen before.

Dawnpaw looked around, feeling somewhat awkward. She wanted

to make a new friend, but she didn't know who. She padded slowly around, making her way through the large crowd of cats. After walking past a large gray tom she spotted a silver tabby she-cat about her age. Summoning all of her confidence, Dawnpaw approached her. "Hi there." She greeted, trying to keep her voice steady.

The silver tabby looked at Dawnpaw, her blue eyes were confused for a moment but then her expression shifted to playful. "Well, hi!" She greeted. "I haven't seen you around here? Are you a new apprentice."

Dawnpaw shook her head. "I've been an apprentice four about three moons now." She replied. "This is just my first gathering, I wasn't able to go to the past two."

"You've been an apprentice as long as I have!" The apprentice purred. "But I've been to all three gatherings so far. My name is Silverpaw, what's yours?"

"Dawnpaw." She replied, holding her head high. The she-cat was nice and friendly, maybe she really had made a friend?

"Nice to meet you, Dawnpaw." Silverpaw dipped her head. "I'm from AshClan, and let me guess..." She thought for a moment. "You're from SunClan?"

Dawnpaw nodded. "How could you tell?" She asked.

"Just a hunch," She mewed. "How are you liking the gathering so far." She questioned.

Dawnpaw looked around. "I like it, it's really exciting." As Dawnpaw replied she noticed that Silverpaw's eyes had trailed to the scars on her shoulder.

"That looks bad, what happened?" Silverpaw asked before meeting Dawnpaw's gaze once more.

Dawnpaw hesitated, would telling another Clan what happened with the eagle be exposing weakness? If anything, she figured it would make SunClan look better knowing that one of their

apprentices survived such an attack. She would just leave out the part about Pebblekit. "There was an eagle that came into our camp," Dawnpaw replied. "We drove it off but not before it clawed my shoulder."

Silverpaw's eyes widened. "Wow, you don't see an eagle everyday. I'm glad that every cat in SunClan is okay." Dawnpaw nodded, then noticed movement out of the corner of her eye. She looked over towards the great oaks and watched as the four leaders climbed the trees to sit above the rest of the Clans. Flowerstar sat in one of the trees on the outside, next to her sat a large, golden brown tom. Dawnpaw assumed that was Lionstar of AshClan. Beside AshClan sat a lean, black tom. Dawnpaw could see he had a white paw and ears, was that Crowstar? Finally, on the last tree was a large, dark red-brown tom. Dawnpaw noticed that his long tail was broken and bent, Dawnpaw realized it was Jaggedstar of LichenClan.

"The gathering is beginning!" SIlverpaw mewed excitedly before sitting down and facing the leaders. Dawnpaw watched as the rest of the cats in the hollow sat down as well, facing the four leaders, she did the same.

"Welcome to the gathering, everyone." The golden tom spoke, his deep voice echoing throughout the trees. "Since Flowerstar was the last one here, why doesn't she start us off?"

Flowerstar gave a nod. "I'd love to, Lionstar." She replied with a purr in her mew. "SunClan is proud to announce that we have two new warriors here at the gathering tonight. Please welcome Squirreltail and Redclaw."

"Squirreltail! Redclaw!" The cats of the Clans cheered, and Dawnpaw felt a sense of warmth. She was glad that the rest of the Clans celebrated new warriors, she wondered if this happened when she was made an apprentice.

"We would also like to announce that Willownose gave birth to three healthy kits." Flowerstar added.

"New kits are always a good sign for the forest." The black leader purred. "Congratulations to SunClan."

"Thank you, Crowstar." Flowerstar dipped her head kindly. "To conclude, prey is running well and SunClan is strong and healthy." She turned her green gaze onto Lionstar. "Would you like to go next?"

Lionstar nodded and lifted his head high. "AshClan welcomes two new apprentices, Wheatpaw and Larkpaw. They are not at this gathering tonight, but we're still proud to welcome them as apprentices."

"Wheatpaw! Larkpaw!" The Clans cheered once more, even though the cats weren't here.

"That is all the news AshClan has to report other than prey is running well in our territory." Lionstar turned to Crowstar and signaled him to go next.

"MoonClan is striving," Crowstar began, Dawnpaw could see his ice blue eyes even from this distance. "We welcome two new kits born to Ashfeather. Brambleflight has also decided to move to the elder's den, she has served MoonClan well."

The Clans didn't cheer for Brambleflight, but there was warm murmurs towards the she-cat.

"MoonClan has nothing else to report," Crowstar sat back down and turned to Jaggedstar. "If you will, Jaggedstar."

Jaggedstar nodded and faced the Clans. "LichenClan is doing well, we don't have much news to announce but prey is running well and we remain strong."

"Then I suppose that concludes the announcements." Flowerstar spoke. "I'll be looking forward to the next gathering." She gave a warm farewell as the leaders jumped down from their trees.

"We don't have to leave yet." Silverpaw mewed, standing up and stretching slightly. "Normally after the announcements cats stay and talk for a while."

Dawnpaw stood up as well, looking back at the AshClan apprentice. She enjoyed knowing about what was going on the other Clans, she

felt enlightened.

"Silverpaw!" Dawnpaw heard a voice call her new friend's name, and she noticed a cat pushing his way through a group of cats. He was about the size of Lionpaw, clearly an apprentice. He had dark gray tabby fur and golden amber eyes.

Silverpaw turned to the other apprentice, letting out a purr when she saw him. "Hello, Ashpaw. Enjoy the gathering?"

Ashpaw nodded, then rested his gaze on Dawnpaw. "Who's this?" He questioned, Dawnpaw could help but notice the slight edge of hostility in his mew.

"This is Dawnpaw of SunClan," Silverpaw replied, her voice much softer than Ashpaw's. "This is her first gathering, but she's about as old as I am." Silverpaw looked back towards Dawnpaw. "Dawnpaw, this is my Clanmate, Ashpaw."

"Nice to meet you." Dawnpaw dipped her head kindly, but Ashpaw didn't seem that interested in her.

"You too." He replied, but his heart wasn't behind it. He turned back to Silverpaw. "Lilyclaw was looking for you."

Silverpaw looked around. "What did she need?" She questioned. Ashpaw shrugged and Dawnpaw noticed another cat approaching the group of apprentices. It was the gray she-cat sitting with the other deputies. Dawnpaw figured it was the AshClan deputy Echoheart.

"Lilyclaw just wanted to know where you were, Silverpaw." Echoheart spoke, causing the silver apprentice to jump slight. She turned on her paws to face the she-cat, Dawnpaw felt Echoheart's gaze resting on her.

"Who is this?" Echoheart questioned, something about her mew unsettled Dawnpaw. She shuffled her paws but replied quickly. "My name is Dawnpaw, I'm from SunClan."

Echoheart gave a small nod. "Is this your first gathering? I remember hearing your name a few moons ago, yet I've never seen

you around? Did you get in trouble?"

Dawnpaw shook her head, feeling incredibly small under her gaze. Her eyes were a dark, murky green. "No, the first one I stayed back in camp and the second one I was hurt and couldn't go."

"What hurt you?" Echoheart questioned. "I hope no other cats in your Clan got hurt, little one."

"I don't think that's really much of your business." Dawnpaw nearly jumped out of her fur as Thornpelt stepped in beside her. She looked up at the warrior, his pale grown fur lined with several scars and his amber eyes narrowed at Echoheart. "Pestering young apprentices for information, Echoheart? That doesn't seem like you."

Echoheart let out a light-hearted laugh, but Dawnpaw couldn't help but feel there was some inkling of sarcasm behind it. "I was just concerned for this apprentice, wanted to make sure no one in SunClan was hurt as bad as she was."

"Dawnpaw is clearly fine." Thornpelt replied. "She's here isn't she? And she was the only one injured."

Echoheart gave a nod. "That's good to hear." Echoheart turned to Ashpaw and Silverpaw who were sitting awkwardly beside her. "Lionstar will be leading the Clan home soon, we should gather with the others."

Silverpaw nodded. "Alright." She mewed and stood up, looking at Dawnpaw. "It was nice to meet you, Dawnpaw. I'll see you at the next gathering." She and Ashpaw turned away, but Echoheart remained a moment longer, her gazed seemed to be locked with Thornpelt's. With an almost silent laugh, Echoheart turned away to follow the apprentices.

Dawnpaw looked up at Thornpelt. "Did I do something wrong?" She questioned, wondering if Thornpelt would be upset with her for making friends with Silverpaw or talking with Echoheart.

"No you didn't, Dawnpaw." Thornpelt replied without looking at her. He turned around, looking towards Flowerstar where SunClan

was getting ready to leave. "You did just fine, let's go home."

Chapter 5

"Great catch, Dawnpaw!" Sunstream praised, her voice filled with pride. Dawnpaw looked down at her squirrel, pride swelling up inside her. She turned over to her mentor who gave her an approving nod. It had been a little less than a moon since Dawnpaw's first gathering and her shoulder was essentially healed. Poppyfur cleared her to return to her normal apprentice duties and as soon as she did, Sunstream worked with her hard to catch up with Turtlepaw.

Dawnpaw worked endlessly to learn both hunting and battle skills, and it had paid off. A few days after she started training Dawnpaw caught her first piece of prey and now she made sure to catch as much prey as she could every day to make up for the moons when went without. Dawnpaw buried her squirrel and continued her hunt.

She breathed in the air around her, ignoring the scent of trees and flora around her attempting to single out the scent of prey. Closing her eyes until she caught of scent of mouse lingering on the air. Dawnpaw followed her nose, stepping gingerly on the forest floor careful not to step on any of the brittle leaves that had fallen. It was early leaf-fall and it was starting to get colder. All the more reason for Dawnpaw to work on catching as much prey as possible.

As the mouse scent grew stronger, Dawnpaw dropped lower to the ground. Grateful her golden brown pelt would melt in with the forest scenery. She crept forward, eventually spotting the mouse scurrying among leaves looking for some seeds to nibble on. Dawnpaw narrowed her eyes and jumped forward, her paws landing on the mouse and snapping it's neck quickly. Dawnpaw once more buried her fresh-kill and looked to see if Sunstream had followed her.

She had been grateful to have a mentor like Sunstream, she was encouraging and patient with her, everytime she made a mistake Sunstream helped her to improve. Dawnpaw was starting to regain

some of her confidence, knowing that she was actually contributing more to SunClan than just moss. She even knew some battle moves, another thing Dawnpaw was improving on lately.

"Did you catch another piece of prey?" Sunstream questioned. "You snuck off on me I didn't know where you went." Her green eyes sparkled.

Dawnpaw nodded. "I caught a mouse." She replied, feeling comforted by Sunstream's approving gaze. "Should be keep hunting?" She questioned.

"I don't see why not." Sunstream glanced up towards the sky, the sun was still high in the sky, just slightly fallen past sunhigh. "The day is still early, and we don't have much else to do today." She replied. Dawnpaw nodded and continued tracking down some prey. She padded through the undergrowth of SunClan's territory. She could smell the AshClan border in the distance, and made sure not to venture too close.

Dawnpaw caught a trace of another squirrel, and dropped into a crouch. She kept on the scent trail, determined to catch her third piece of prey. Her paws moved silently across the forest floor and she kept her breath quietly. As Dawnpaw neared the squirrel, which was contently nibbling on some beech nuts. However, as Dawnpaw stepped closer another scent grew closer.

It was a cat, a SunClan cat. Mixed with blood and fear, her fur rose up along her spine and she could hear paws running against the forest. Her squirrel dashed away into the forest and Dawnpaw stood up straight. Redclaw burst through the forest, his green eyes were wide with fear. Blood welled from a wound on his shoulder, trailing down his leg.

"Redclaw!" Sunstream exclaimed, bursting out beside Dawnpaw. "What happened to you?" She demanded.

"AshClan attacked our patrol," He explained, panting heavily. "They're heading towards the SunClan camp!" Dawnpaw flattened her ears. AshClan was invading?

"Where's the rest of the patrol?" Sunstream questioned.

"They couldn't hold off AshClan so they fled back to camp for help, I ran off earlier because I got injured pretty badly." He glanced at his wounded shoulder which was still bleeding steadily. Sunstream turned to Dawnpaw, her green eyes serious.

"Help Redclaw back to camp, don't rush him. I'm going back to fight, when you get to camp make sure he gets to Pebblestep and if you need to fight then you can, just don't put yourself in danger. Do you understand?"

Dawnpaw nodded, trying to shove away the fear clogging her heart, but she had to stay strong. This is what warriors did, she had to help her Clanmate. "I understand." She said, trying to keep her voice steady. Without another word, Sunstream sprinted into the forest, her golden pelt vanishing in a second. Dawnpaw looked up at Redclaw, he looked exhausted and pain was written across his entire body. "Let's go." She replied and she and the ginger tom pressed on into the forest.

Dawnpaw kept her senses on alert for any trace of AshClan warriors, she kept a steady pace towards camp but also made sure that Redclaw was alright. "We should go in the back of camp." Dawnpaw mewed. "We don't want to be attacked before we can get you into the medicine cat den." Redclaw didn't respond, he just gave a nod and followed the apprentice. Dawnpaw felt somewhat awkward, Redclaw may be a brand new warrior, but she still felt strange guiding him as she was only an apprentice.

Redclaw and Dawnpaw neared camp, she could hear the yowling and hissing of battle which turned her blood cold. She didn't dare look into the camp, she couldn't yet. Dawnpaw and Redclaw ducked behind the camp, sneaking past the elder's den and into the camp's back entrance. Chaos was rampant in the camp, she saw her Clan in full fledged battle with AshClan, but she didn't have time to take in the scene. She had to help Redclaw into the medicine cat den, she urged him forward and stepped inside. Pebblekit wasn't in sight, but Dawnpaw saw a tiny bundle of gray and white fur hidin in the herb store, there must not have been enough time to get Pebblekit into the moss hollow where kits and elders normally went.

Poppyfur was inside, tending to a chest wound on Snowtail, her white fur stained red. She looked over at Dawnpaw and Redclaw. "Is he the only one injured?" She questioned. Dawnpaw nodded. "He was in the original patrol and he found Sunstream and I." She explained.

"Sit down in a nest, Redclaw I'll get to you in just a moment." Poppyfur demanded before turning back to Snowtail. "Go out there and fight, Dawnpaw. Just be wary of your shoulder." Dawnpaw nodded, she couldn't hesitate any longer. She gathered all of her bravery and left the medicine cat den, going into the fray of the battle.

Dawnpaw spotted Goldenpaw fighting with Silverpaw, but Goldenpaw seemed to be winning. Silverpaw had bloody scratches along her flank and Goldenpaw only had a scratch above her eye, Dawnpaw felt uncomfortable, knowing Silverpaw was her friend. *No!* Dawnpaw shook her head. *Silverpaw is not my friend today, she is my enemy.* She had to remind herself, with a deep breath Dawnpaw ran into battle looking to help her Clan.

Before she could any closer something knocked her off her paws. Dawnpaw felt a heavy weight on her, and was smothered by dark fur. Unsheathing her claws, Dawnpaw dug them into the flesh of the cat that had attacked her. The cat let out a hiss and let her up, she jumped to her paws and noticed that she had been attacked by Ashpaw. His amber eyes blazed with fury. Dawnpaw couldn't allow him another chance to knock her down, she gathered her strength into her haunches and jumped onto him, claws extended. Her claws hooked into his skin and she felt his teeth bite into her pelt. She ignored the pain, she had felt much worse!

Ashpaw pushed a forepaw into her stomach and knocked Dawnpaw off and onto her back. With an alarm, she rolled onto her paws before Ashpaw could go for her belly. She lashed out with her claws, barely missing his chest. Ashpaw recoiled and knocked Dawnpaw off her paws once more, her shoulder hitting the ground hard. She bit back a cry of pain and battered at Ashpaw with her paws. She felt her claws cut into his pelt once more, leaving scratches along his chest.

Ashpaw pressed his weight against her, pinning her to the ground while he clawed at her haunches. Dawnpaw hissed and attempted to pull out from under him, she managed to squeeze out half-way from under him and notice her mouth was by his head. She bit down into his ear as hard as she could. Ashpaw let out a yowl of pain and lessened his weight on her.

Dawnpaw felt teeth in the scruff of her neck as she was violently pulled off Ashpaw, but she didn't have time to release the bite on his ear. She felt her teeth rip through thin flesh on his ear. Ashpaw let out a cry of pain as Dawnpaw was thrown off. She hit the ground hard and had to take a moment before she realized who attacked her. It was another AshClan apprentice, this one a gray tom with dark green eyes.

She looked over at Ashpaw who had blood welling heavily from his ear and rage in his eyes. He dashed forward to attack her once more, but Dawnpaw rolled away. However, she had forgotten for a moment about the other apprentice and she felt claws dig into her flank. She cried out in pain and struggled to get away. *I can't fight two cats at once!* As if he had heard her cry, Dawnpaw saw a flash of golden fur as Lionpaw tackled Ashpaw to the ground, digging his large claws into the AshClan's cats fur.

Dawnpaw jumped to her paws and faced the other gray tom, jumped onto his back, her claws digging into his back. The gray tom struggled to shake her off, and as he struggled Dawnpaw just dug her claws deeper into his fur. With a final heave, Dawnpaw was knocked off. She rolled on the ground, kicking up dust and grass. The gray tom ran to Ashpaw who was being pinned down by Lionpaw, and shoved Lionpaw away before helping Ashpaw stand up.

His ear was coated in blood and he had several more deep scratches along his flank, whereas Lionpaw only had a few smaller scratches. His amber eyes had a deep fire in them as he rose to his paws once more.

"We need to back off." The gray apprentice told Ashpaw, the darker tabby hesitated but eventually nodded and slipped back into the battle. Dawnpaw noticed Lionpaw beginning to run after him, but

Dawnpaw cut him off.

"Let him go, we don't need to kill him" Dawnpaw said to her friend. The intensity died down slightly in his eyes and he gave a nod. Dawnpaw looked around, the AshClan warriors were starting to look worn down. Tigertail and Bramblepelt were facing a gray she-cat and a brown tabby she-cat, the she-cats bleeding from multiple wounds whereas the SunClan warriors stood tall and full of energy.

"Stop this!" A loud, deep voice echoed through the SunClan camp and the battle dropped to an unnerving silence. Dawnpaw looked to where the sound was coming from, several SunClan and AshClan warriors cleared the way for Lionstar, his green eyes lit with anger. Beside him was a blue-gray she-cat with the same look of anger in her eyes, along with shock. Lionstar and the she-cat looked as if they hadn't fought at all, they were both free of any injuries.

"Lionstar!" Flowerstar pushed past several warriors to face the AshClan leader. The gray she-cat had several scratches along her flank but looked relatively uninjured. "Why are you attacking our camp?" She demanded.

"I'm not." He replied. "Echoheart is." Sounds of shock and confusion spread out through SunClan's camp. "I never approved of this battle, Echoheart came to me suggesting it but I told her it was unnecessary." Dawnpaw looked for the AshClan deputy, and spotted the gray tabby she-cat near Sandfoot. Echoheart's paws were covered with blood, sending nerves down Dawnpaw's spine.

"Lionstar." She spoke up. "This battle is--"
"*Silence!*" Lionstar's voice seemed to shake the very ground on which they cats were standing, Dawnpaw noticed Echoheart wince. "You went behind my back, Echoheart, and from the looks of it you lied to your Clanmates."

Suddenly, there was cry of alarm that came from one of the SunClan cats, they all turned to see Applespots standing with her eyes wide. "Sunstream is dead!"

Dawnpaw felt as if her heart dropped into her paws, the world suddenly slowed down. *Sunstream was dead? No, that can't be true!*

Dawnpaw felt Lionpaw tense beside her, she looked at him and saw that the fury of battle in his eyes had been replaced with pain and shock.

Lionstar dropped his head. "Flowerstar, SunClan, this was never supposed to happen." His voice was lined with pain and regret.

"The action of your deputy cost me the life of one of my most faithful warriors!" Flowerstar hissed, Dawnpaw had never heard her sound so angry. "I hope there will be some kind of punishment for Echoheart's actions!"
"There will be," Lionstar lifted his head once more. "I'm going to do this right now, so that all of SunClan will hear it." His voice echoed through the camp. "Echoheart will no longer be the deputy of AshClan!"

Gasps filled the air, Dawnpaw noticed Echoheart stepping closer to her leader. "You can't do this to me, Lionstar!" She cried, her voice pleading.

"I can and I am, Echoheart." Lionstar looked down at his former deputy who appeared to be cowering under him. "You are an irresponsible and senseless warrior, and you do not deserve the title of deputy." Echoheart didn't respond, but she looked as if she was about to run into the forest. "I'm going to name the new deputy of AshClan, the only warrior who didn't follow through with Echoheart's plan, the cat who told me that this unjust battle was taking place." Lionstar raised his voice. "I say these words before the spirit of Sunstream, so that she may forgive AshClan's actions today, her death should not have happened." Thorns pierced Dawnpaw's heart, and Lionpaw lowered his head. "Riverstorm will be the new deputy of AshClan!"

The blue-gray she-cat beside Lionstar looked somewhat shocked but stepped forward. "SunClan, I hope you come in time to forgive AshClan for what we have done today, and if there's any cat to blame here it is Echoheart. Most of the AshClan warrior's here believed they were fighting under the rule of Lionstar, not Echoheart. As deputy I will make sure that this will never happen again."

Flowerstar looked down at Riverstorm, who took a small step back. "I should hope not." She growled. "Leave now, AshClan and do not come back to SunClan's territory or you will regret it." Lionstar gave a nod, and turned away. The AshClan warriors followed, their heads lowered. Dawnpaw couldn't see Echoheart mixed among the other warriors, but she knew that the AshClan warrior was not happy. Was she the one who killed Sunstream?"

When the AshClan warriors were gone from sight, Flowerstar lifted her head and spoke to her Clan. "Cats of SunClan, see to your wounds and repairing the camp. I will speak with you in a moment, but we need to care for our injured and prepare for Sunstream's vigil, even though it never should have happened." There was pain in Flowerstar's eyes, but she turned away. Lionpaw left Dawnpaw's side and went to Goldenpaw's there was pain deep in her amber eyes. They eventually moved towards their father, Tigertail. He pressed close against their kits.

Dawnpaw felt grief weighing heavily in her chest, like a storm cloud clogged with rain. She stared at her paws, choking back her sadness. It was almost too hard to breathe, was Sunstream really dead? Why did this have to happen? Dawnpaw heard pawsteps behind her and jumped around in alarm, only to see Turtlepaw.

"I'm glad to see you're okay." Turtlepaw stepped forward, touching his nose to hers. "When I heard Sunstream was dead..." He looked down. "I figured you were with her."

*I should've been...*The thought crept up on her, but she tried to shake it away. *No, Sunstream told me to take Redclaw back to camp and I did. He's safe in camp and Sunstream's...* Dawnpaw couldn't hide the guilt, it festered in her chest like an old wound opened again. The old wound of Willowkit's death... Dawnpaw closed her eyes, digging her claws into the ground. She could feel her legs trembling, she saw flashes of Willowkit's dead body in her mind, her sister coughing to death as the poisoned deathberries slowly killed her. *I'm sorry, Willowkit! I'm sorry, Sunstream!*

"Dawnpaw!" The images in Dawnpaw's mind suddenly crumbled, Turtlepaw was looking at her with concern in her eyes. Dawnpaw's breathing was heavy, as if she had just run across the entire forest.

"Are you alright? Do you need to go to Poppyfur?" His green eyes began looking over her pelt, none of her wounds were that bad though.

"No," Dawnpaw replied, her voice unsteady. "I'm alright, I just need a moment." She dropped her head and tried to take a deep breath. Dawnpaw heard quiet talking behind her and looked over to shoulder, she was caught off guard as she saw Bramblepelt and Rainears carrying Sunstream's body to Poppyfur's den. There was a large wound on Sunstream's neck that was coated in still wet blood, Dawnpaw choked on her own breath as it seemed to fail in her lungs. Once more, she spotted Willowkit's dead body, only her body was still and gentle, not bloody and wounded like Sunstream's.

Dawnpaw closed her eyes and turned away from Sunstream's body, she felt Turtlepaw rush to her side, he could feel his warm pelt against hers and Dawnpaw fell against her brother. Her breathing was heavy and unsteady, she couldn't get the image of Sunstream's dead body out of her mind. Turtlepaw stayed beside her, and Dawnpaw didn't want to leave her brother's side.

"Dawnpaw." Dawnpaw heard the warm, soothing voice of her mother and turned to see Windflight and Blazeheart looking at her with worry and love in their eyes. "Are you alright?" She questioned.

"Why did Sunstream have to die?" Dawnpaw choked out the question, the same question that she asked herself when Willowkit died.

Blazeheart stepped forward, his green eyes soft. "Death happens, Dawnpaw. It's hard to lose a cat you care about but now Sunstream is safe and happy in SunClan. I bet she's looking over Willowkit for us too."

Dawnpaw's heart seemed to break even more, she dropped her head and closed her eyes. Instead of picture Sunstream's and Willowkit's dead bodies, she pictured them somewhere else. A place with a lush, green flora and plentiful amounts of prey. She saw tiny Willowkit playing with Sunstream, and she also saw another shimmering, golden cat with green eyes. The image sent warmth

through Dawnpaw's body, but there was still the dull ache of Sunstream's death.

"It's okay to be upset about losing, Sunstream." Blazeheart added. "But she'll always be with you, Dawnpaw. Just as Willowkit will."

Dawnpaw looked up at her parents, grateful for their kind words, she took a deep breath and looked towards the medicine cat den where Sunstream's body would be being prepared for her silent vigil. Dawnpaw hadn't gone to Willowkit's, she had been too distressed at the time, but Dawnpaw vowed she would sit through the entirety of Sunstream's.

Dawnpaw had kept her vow, the sun was slowly rising and the elder's, along with Tigertail were taking Sunstream's body to be buried. Dawnpaw watched as Lionpaw and Goldenpaw walked side by side, towards the apprentice den to sleep. Neither of them had said a word since their mother's death, Dawnpaw watched them sadly. She hoped that both Lionpaw and Goldenpaw would be okay.

Dawnpaw noticed out of the corner of her eye, Flowerstar jumping to her place on the SunTree, she didn't have to summon the Clan as most of them were already there. "I know that Sunstream's death is tragic and it pains all of us to lose such a faithful warrior." Dawnpaw looked at her paws. "But as you all know, Sunstream was mentor to Dawnpaw, and her training mustn't be delayed." Dawnpaw looked back up at her leader, she had completely forgotten that she would be given a new mentor, she was mostly upset by the loss of her friend than her mentor. "I will allow Dawnpaw to rest for today, but for tomorrow she must have a new mentor. "Dawnpaw, please step forward."

Dawnpaw slowly padded forward, ready to greet whoever her new mentor would be. "From this day forward, your new mentor will be Thornpelt." The large, pale gray tom stepped out from the group and looked down at Dawnpaw with an interesting look in his eyes.

"Thank you, Flowerstar. I know I cannot replace Sunstream, but I promise I will do my best to train this young warrior." Thornpelt spoke loudly.

"I know you will, Thornpelt." There was something off about Flowerstar's tone, it seemed unsteady.

Thornpelt leaned forward, touching noses with Dawnpaw for a brief moment before turning away. Dawnpaw was left feeling somewhat uncomfortable, she already missed Sunstream but she knew that she had to do her best, she couldn't let Sunstream's training go to waste.

Chapter 6

"That was sloppy!" Thornpelt hissed, batting his paw over Dawnpaw's ear. She winced and bit back a hiss. Dawnpaw winced her stinging ear, she personally didn't think that her catch was sloppy, but she knew that Thornpelt was picky. Dawnpaw broke slightly away from her mentor to seek out more prey. She sniffed the early morning air for more traces of prey, there wasn't as much around this early but Thornpelt wouldn't accept her giving up so she kept on tracking.

Luckily, Dawnpaw caught the scent of sparrow, and heard the flapping of wings. Just a few taillengths in front of her, the small brown bird landed gently on the ground and began pecking at the moist dirt for it's own meal. Dawnpaw crouched down, closer to the ground, taking a deep breath before she pounced. The bird began to fly away, but Dawnpaw was faster than it's wings.

Her claws snagged on the bird and brought it down to to the ground where she killed with with a swift bite to the neck. Feeling confident in her quick, clean catch she lifted her head high, looking around for Thornpelt. Her mentor strode past her, his amber eyes nearly empty. "Better." He said sharply. "But there's room for improvement."

Dawnpaw once again, bit back a retort and buried her prey. She followed her mentor silently, wishing once more that she was back with Sunstream. Sunstream encouraged her and praised her for her catches, Dawnpaw didn't think that she had gotten a single praise from Thornpelt in the half-moon that she had been his apprentice. Whenever she made a serious error she was met him cuffing his paw over her ear, rather harshly too.

After everyday of hunting or training her ear stung, which annoyed her even more. To her, hunting and training was no longer fun. She didn't enjoy going out to hunt or train for battle and she never got to train with her fellow apprentices, she hoped one day she would.

She spent most of her time battling just Thornpelt, and he didn't hold back. She'd spend her days sore and bruised from trying to take on a fully grown warrior.

Dawnpaw followed closely with her mentor, he never stopped to wait for her, she had to keep up with him. She walked with long strides through the forest, following close by with her mentor. After a moment he came to a stop and looked around at her. "Try and hunt over here, come back to me after you've caught two pieces of prey."

Dawnpaw didn't complain, she just gave a nod and continued her hunt. She crouched down and stalked down a mouse, and not long afterwards she tracked down a squirrel. She returned them to her mentor who looked at the prey, then back at her. "Good enough." He mewed. "Gather the rest of your prey and then meet me back at camp. You may take some time to rest but at sunhigh we're doing battle training. I might ask some of the other mentors if they want their apprentices to join with us."

Dawnpaw felt a bit better, she was looking forward to training with another apprentice and not just Thornpelt, part of her hoped it would be Turtlepaw. She also hoped it might be Goldenpaw and Lionpaw, she hadn't really spoken to them much since Sunstream's death, she had been too busy with training. From dawn until nightfall she was training hard, and then she went to bed and woke up again at dawn.

Thornpelt vanished into the forest and Dawnpaw grabbed her prey, she trekked through the forest, taking her time and resting her muscles. She grabbed her sparrow and her earlier mouse that had been "sloppy". She picked it up and made her way back to camp at a steady pace, she didn't want to waste too much time in the forest but she wasn't going to be running back home.

When she made it back to camp, Thornpelt wasn't in sight, but she decided to take some prey to Pebblekit and Poppyfur, the medicine cat had been rather busy with treating leftover wounds from the battle alongside Pebblekit. The kit was nearing six moons old very quickly, and still had no sense of smell. The entire Clan was worried about what would happen with the young kit.

Dawnpaw brought one of her mice and the sparrow to Poppyfur, she poked her head inside the medicine cat den where Poppyfur was putting a fresh batch of herbs on Redclaw's shoulder. Meanwhile, Pebblekit was sitting in her nest batting around a small piece of moss. The cobweb had been taken off of her face, but Dawnpaw could see traces of herbs. The several scars that lined her face had gotten smaller, but were still very notable.

"Hello there, Dawnpaw." Poppyfur greeted, not looking away from her patient. "Are those pieces of prey for us?" Dawnpaw nodded and set down the prey.

Pebblekit hopped out of her nest and bounded over to the mouse. "Thank you, Dawnpaw!" She purred. Dawnpaw couldn't help but feel a surge of happiness, despite what Pebblekit was going through, she remained happy and still played like a kit. Something Dawnpaw had missed out on the last few moons as a kit, once again she was glad that she made the decision to save Pebblekit, Cinderkit and Yarrowkit still had their littermate.

Dawnpaw heard shuffling behind her and turned to see Adderpaw in the entrance, he was favoring one of his forepaws and had a look of pain on his face. Poppyfur glanced over at him for just a moment. "Something wrong, Adderpaw?" She questioned before turning back to Redclaw.

Adderpaw nodded, looking at his paw. "I stepped on a thorn while training today, I pulled it out but it still hurts really bad. Crowfur thinks it might be infected, she told me to come and see you." He explained.

"Sit down, I'll get to you in just a moment." Poppyfur instructed and Adderpaw sat down beside where Dawnpaw was standing. Dawnpaw was going to leave, but she noticed Pebblekit looking up from her mouse. She left her prey and padded over to the silver apprentice, looking up at him.

"May I?" The tiny she-kit asked, Adderpaw looked at Dawnpaw with a confused look but he nodded and held his paw out for the kit to inspect. Dawnpaw watched as Pebblekit gingerly touched her tiny paw to his injured paw. "It feels hot, and that means it's swollen and

could become infected. "I think Poppyfur uses either horsetail or marigold to treat that."

Dawnpaw and Adderpaw stared at the kit, who looked at them with equal confusion. Dawnpaw noticed that Poppyfur was now staring at her as well. "What?" The she-cat questioned, looking uncomfortable under their gazes.

"You're done, Redclaw." Poppyfur mewed, turning back to the red warrior. "Remember to take it easy." With that, Redclaw gave a nod and left the medicine cat den. Poppyfur stood up and looked down at Pebblekit. "Why don't you go play with your littermates for a while, I'm sure they're up by now."

"Okay!" Pebblekit didn't argue as she bounded out of the medicine cat den and towards the nursery.

Poppyfur walked over to Adderpaw without another word, sniffing his paw. "Pebblekit was right, it's swollen but not infected. She was also right about the treatment." Poppyfur moved to her store and came back with some yellow flowers in her jaws.

"Have you been teaching Pebblekit about herbs?" Dawnpaw questioned, Poppyfur didn't answer until she had chewed the herb into a poultice.

"I'd talk about herbs but I didn't think she was listening." Poppyfur replied. "She always looked so bored in here."

"Maybe she learned more than you think." Dawnpaw replied, then hesitated a moment. "What if Pebblekit became your apprentice?" She questioned.

Poppyfur looked at Dawnpaw with doubt in her eyes. "Would she even want to? I always figured that she wanted to be a warrior alongside her littermates."

"I don't think that's really an option for her." Dawnpaw answered sadly. "She can't track prey, she can't find borders. At least with herbs you can see them and they don't run away, she can feel infections with her paws. She would probably enjoy being a

medicine cat a lot more than being a warrior who can't hunt."

Poppyfur hesitated, she finished the herb dressing on Adderpaw and dismissed him. "I'll think about it." She replied, looking at Dawnpaw. "And I'll ask her if she wants to be my apprentice."

Dawnpaw nodded, that's all she could really hope for. She turned away and exited the medicine cat den, she looked over at the nursery where she heard the happy squeaking of Pebblekit and her littermates playing. Willownose's kits were still too young to play with the older kits. Dawnpaw watched the three kits play and couldn't help but a have a glimmer of hope for Pebblekit's future.

Dawnpaw walked beside Lionpaw while their mentors led them towards the training area. She felt a new excitement in her paws as they walked through the forest, she would finally get to train with a cat other than Thornpelt. Lionpaw was much bigger than she was, but she was able to fight off Ashpaw, right? Dawnpaw recalled her battle with the apprentice, and how she had managed to hold her own against him until the other apprentice came along.

When the two mentors and apprentices reached the training hollow, Dawnpaw sat down beside Lionpaw. She looked at him, wondering if he was as excited as she was. However, Lionpaw had a vacant look in his eyes, he didn't have the normal energy burning in them that he usually did.

"You both know this," Thornpelt began. "But the most important thing about a battle is never letting your guard down. You must keep a constant focus on your opponent as well as the world around you, you never know when another cat could join in the fray." Thornpelt circled the apprentices. "If you let your guard down for even a moment it could be the death of you or someone else, you need to protect yourself as well as attacking your enemy." He stepped back to sit beside Rustpelt. "I want you two to fight each other, the two of us will be creating as many distractions as possible, do not lose your focus."

Dawnpaw nodded and stood up, facing Lionpaw. She met his gaze and noticed that there wasn't a spark of battle in them, just a dull determination. "Go!" At Rustpelt's call, Lionpaw jumped forward,

knocking Dawnpaw over.

She quickly rolled away from his paws and turned quickly to attack him. Her paws aimed for his side, but Lionpaw moved away from her, causing her to stumble forward clumsily. Lionpaw's forepaw hit Dawnpaw's hind legs, knocking them out from under her and making her fall once more. Dawnpaw recovered quickly, however, getting back on her paws before Lionpaw could pin her down. *He's a lot harder to fight than I thought!* Dawnpaw heard shouting and rustling beside her, and almost turned to look but reminded herself that Rustpelt and Thornpelt were attempting to distract them.

Dawnpaw avoided a narrow hit to her head from LIonpaw and stumbled backwards on her paws before recoiling to jump on her shoulders. She knew she could use her smaller body to her advantage if she got on his back, but Lionpaw was prepared for this and knocked her away. Dawnpaw landed on her paws, taking a half-second to catch her breath before she ran around him, going for his back again.

Lionpaw was everywhere she was however, he left no openings for her attack and just kept knocking her back. He body was starting to ache and her breathing was getting heavier whereas Lionpaw looked like he was full of energy. There was a loud snapping sound to their left, Dawnpaw ignored it but Lionpaw looked over in alarm.

Now's my chance! Without hesitating Dawnpaw launched herself at the golden apprentice, using the entire force of her weight to knock him off his paws. He hit the ground with a huff and Dawnpaw pinned him to the ground before he could recover.

"That's enough." Thornpelt called, and Dawnpaw let Lionpaw stand up. He stood and shook dust from his fur. He looked at Dawnpaw and gave a nod before turning to his mentor.

"Lionpaw you were fighting incredibly well," Rustpelt mewed, his amber eyes growing slightly darker. "But you allowed yourself to get distracted." Lionpaw lowered his head, not speaking.

"As for you, Dawnpaw," Dawnpaw tensed as her own mentor began speaking, but she looked at him nonetheless. "You couldn't land

many attacks on him, but you stayed focused and you kept trying which is admirable. Not bad considering you're against a much more experienced opponent." Dawnpaw felt warmth growing inside of her, that was probably the best praise she'd ever get from Thornpelt, she looked at Lionpaw to see what he would say but he kept his head low and his eyes shadowed. Dawnpaw's warm feeling slowly turned cold, what was wrong with him?

"Why don't you two take a moment to rest." Rustpelt suggested. "We will pick back up in just a moment." He turned to Thornpelt. "May I speak with you for a moment?" He questioned and the two tom cats slipped into the trees.

They thought they got farther but Dawnpaw could just barely make out what they were saying. "Lionpaw isn't acting like his usual self." Rustpelt mewed to Thornpelt. "He's not as confident, but it looks as if he's trying harder and yet he's distant and distracted easily."

"It probably has something to do with his mother's death." Thornpelt replied, Dawnpaw's heart dropped. She looked at Lionpaw, why hadn't she figured it was because of Sunstream's death, of course it was.

"Hey," Dawnpaw spoke quietly to Lionpaw, he didn't look up. "You fought really well, I could barely land a single blow on you and yet I feel I like I fought all of AshClan."

Lionpaw's tail twitched, he flexed his claws into the sand. "I didn't fight well enough, I still got distracted and I still lost. I can't afford to lose in a real battle."

Dawnpaw looked at her paws. "This wasn't a real battle though, and I'm sure if it was you would've remained focused." She noticed Lionpaw's claws digging into the ground but he didn't respond. "I'm sorry about Sunstream," She added, Lionpaw went still. "She wasn't my mother, but she was the greatest mentor I could've asked for. I miss her everyday. It's okay to grieve."

"You think I don't know that?" Lionpaw looked up, something sparked in his amber eyes that resembled anger, Dawnpaw feared she made him bad. "I know it's okay to grieve, but I don't want to

waste my life being sad over my mother's death. I want to become better so something like this doesn't happen. So I can protect the cats I care about, but I can't shake the thought of my mother dying from my head." He closed his eyes, pain and sadness contorting his face. "I should've been there to protect her, she shouldn't be dead."

Dawnpaw felt a stab of sympathy for Lionpaw, she knew the pain he was feeling, she knew it all too well, she lowered her head. "I blame myself for Willowkit's death." She said quietly, she could feel Lionpaw's eyes burning into her pelt. "I have every day since it happened, I try to forget about my guilt but it's hard. I even blamed myself for Sunstream's death, I thought I should've stayed by her side but I had to help Redclaw, just like you had to help me." Lionpaw looked at her, his eyes filled a whirlpool of emotions. "Sunstream died a warrior's death, protecting her Clan, and now she's in StarClan." Dawnpaw said, holding his gaze. "And I bet she wouldn't want you blaming yourself for your death just as Willowkit wouldn't want me blaming myself for hers."

Lionpaw looked away for a moment, closing his eyes and contemplating. He opened them once more and returned his gaze to Dawnpaw. "You're right..." He said quietly. "I have to be strong, I can't blame myself forever. I have to be there for Goldenpaw and my father."

Dawnpaw nodded, she could see some of the life returning to his eyes, it made her feel better. A few moments later Thornpelt and Rustpelt returned. "Are you ready to try again?" Rustpelt questioned. Lionpaw stood up and faced his mentor.

"You bet I am."

Dawnpaw and Lionpaw walked beside each other as they made their way back to camp, her body ached but she had new life in her heart. They had battled once more, this time it was even harder to land a blow on him but she kept trying. They completely ignored the distractions and just fought, however in the end Lionpaw had won. Knocking Dawnpaw down and keeping her there, but Dawnpaw was glad that he had this new life in him, and she hoped it would remain.

As Dawnpaw and the other stepped into camp she noticed the Clan starting to gather at the SunTree with Flowerstar sitting up high. She looked around, somewhat confused as to what was going on. She padded up to her brother who was sitting beside Adderpaw. "What's going on?" She questioned.

"Cinderkit's, Yarrowkit's and Pebblekit's apprentice ceremony. Poppyfur said that she's taking Pebblekit on as her apprentice." Joy exploded inside Dawnpaw's chest.

"That's wonderful!" She exclaimed, she looked towards the nursery where Dovetail was fussing over her kits, hoping they would look perfect for their apprentice ceremony. It didn't take long for the three kits to bound over to the SunTree where they would become apprentices.

Once they were settled, Flowerstar began speaking. "Today is a proud day for SunClan," She mewed, her voice echoing loudly and her green eyes soft. "By naming apprentices we show that SunClan will remain strong for many seasons to come. These three kits have waited six long moons and now it is time for them to receive their apprentice names. Please step forward." Cinderkit, Yarrowkit and Pebblekit sat in the center of the Clan, each of them wiggling with impatience as Rockfur and Dovetail watched them with pride.

"Cinderkit, from this day forward until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Cinderpaw." Cinderpaw looked up at her leader with excitement in her eyes. "Blazeheart," Dawnpaw couldn't help but feel a surge of excitement as her father's name was called. "You are a strong, brave warrior, I trust that you will teach everything you know to young Cinderpaw."

"I promise I will, Flowerstar." Blazeheart replied and stepped forward, touching noses with his new apprentice.

"Yarrowkit." Flowerstar looked at the small, fluffy gray kit. He still had some kit fluff and he was smaller than Cinderkit, but he still looked ready. "From this day forward until you earn your warrior name you will be known as Yarrowpaw, your mentor will be Snowtail. Snowtail, I trust you will pass all of your skills and knowledge onto young Yarrowpaw."

"I will." Snowtail purred and touched noses with Yarrowpaw.

"Finally, after Pebblekit's accident, she has lost her sense of smell. However, she never lost her spirit and she has decided to put her skills to becoming a medicine cat." Pebblekit stared up at Flowerstar, Dawnpaw could see that she truly was excited to become an apprentice to Poppyfur.

"From this day forward, until you have earned your true medicine cat name, you will be known as Pebblepaw. I trust that Poppyfur will share will you all her wisdom about caring for the Clan.

Poppyfur stepped forward and touched noses with Pebblepaw, and Dawnpaw could see a certain tenderness in her green eyes as she stared down at her new apprentice. Dawnpaw let out a purr, feeling for the first time since Sunstream's death, that happiness was possible for SunClan.

Chapter 7

Dawnpaw suppressed a shiver as she entered the Gathering Hollow with her Clanmates, she looked into the hollow and it appeared that LichenClan and AshClan had shown up, but MoonClan had yet to arrive. Flicking rain droplets from her whiskers, Dawnpaw continued into the hollow. The past two days had been non-stop rain, it was pouring rain but it was enough to keep the cats of SunClan constantly wet. Dawnpaw hated the rain, she hated being in it and she hated hunting in it. Just another reason for her to mess up and get scolded by Thornpelt.

As of now, her mentor was near the front of the Clan by Flowerstar and Tigertail and Dawnpaw stuck towards the back with Lionpaw, her brother just a few pawsteps ahead of her. As they moved into the hollow, Dawnpaw felt the tension between SunClan and AshClan spark through the air like lightning, none of the AshClan cats made eye contact with the SunClan cats with the exception of a few who just glared. Dawnpaw snorted, probably some friends of Echoheart's.

She looked around the SunClan cats but there was no sign of Echoheart's gray pelt. *Good riddance.* Dawnpaw couldn't help but think that, the fox-heart was a murderer. She twitched her ears in annoyance.

"Keep your claws in." Dawnpaw jumped slightly as she heard the semi-playful mew of Lionpaw. She met his gaze, which was sparking with amusement. "I know AshClan are a bunch of mouse-hearts but there is a truth."

Dawnpaw turned her head away, sticking her nose up. "I know that, doesn't mean I can't think about how rude they are."

Lionpaw laughed and the two of them sat down together, waiting for the gathering to start. Dawnpaw looked over at the LichenClan cats, they were known for their thick, heavy fur and they all looked

miserable with their fur clogged with water. She held herself back from laughing. Behind her, Dawnpaw heard voices and turned to see Crowstar and MoonClan entering the hollow.

Crowstar quickly took his place on his tree. "I apologise for being late," He dipped his head to the other leaders. "The river is a bit dangerous to cross when it's been raining like this."

"It's fine, Crowstar." Flowerstar dipped her head, then looked at the black leader with amusement in her eyes. "You know the rules though, you show up late and you get to start."

Crowstar flicked his whiskers playfully then turn to address the Clans. "MoonClan brings a new warrior to this gathering, please welcome Violetfur!"

"Violetfur! Violetfur!" Dawnpaw looked towards the dark gray she-cat, her strange blue eyes sparkling in the moonlight.

"MoonClan has been struggling slightly with the rain, but we're coping and we're still catching plenty of prey. That is all." With a dip of his head, he sat down.

"I'd like to go next." Jaggedstar spoke up, and the other leaders let him go. "It's sad to announce that LichenClan lost one of our elders a few days ago, Fieldfoot is now in StarClan." The Clans lowered their head in silence, sending respect to the fallen elder. Dawnpaw's heart ached slightly, is this what they did for Willowkit? Is this what they were going to do for Sunstream?

"Fieldfoot was a good cat." Crowstar mewed. "He will be missed by all the Clans." The other two leaders nodded.

"Thank you," Jaggedstar purred. "We are sad by his loss, but LichenClan remains strong and prey is running well."

"I'll go next." Flowerstar spoke when Jaggedstar stepped back. "SunClan is sad to announce that we too lost a cat, Sunstream died during an AshClan invasion." Sunstream got the same silent respect that Fieldfoot did, but Dawnpaw couldn't help but feel a certain awkwardness in the air. She could feel Lionpaw tense beside her,

she placed her tail on his shoulder trying to relax him, and it seemed to work. "However, despite Sunstream's death we are coping well. Tonight, we also have three new apprentices. Please welcome, Cinderpaw, Yarrowpaw and our new medicine cat apprentice, Pebblepaw."

"Cinderpaw! Yarrowpaw! Pebblepaw!" All the Clans cheered for the new apprentices, even some members of AshClan. Cinderpaw held her head high while her siblings looked as if they wanted to hide. Dawnpaw let out a purr of amusement, but they seemed to relax as the cheering died down.

Flowerstar sat down and looked at Lionstar, it was the AshClan's leader turn. The dark golden tom stood up. "First of all, I want to apologize once more for the death of Sunstream." He said, but with the way Flowerstar looked at him Dawnpaw didn't think she'd be forgiving or forgetting for a long time. "I did not organize this battle into AshClan territory, and was done only by Echoheart." He explained. "As a result, I took away Echoheart's deputy status and now Riverstorm is deputy."

Dawnpaw hadn't really looked at Riverstorm before, she had been too shaken by Sunstream's death the first time she met her. The new AshClan deputy was slender, and held her head high. Just by looking at her, Dawnpaw felt more comfortable around her than she did with Echoheart.

"Other than that," Lionstar continued. "AshClan has no other news." He dipped his head and stepped back.

"Then I believed this gathering is concluded." Flowerstar mewed and the leaders jumped down from their trees.

"We're probably leaving early." Lionpaw mewed, stretching out his forelegs. "What with the rain and all," He looked around. "MoonClan cats are the only ones who like getting their fur wet."

Dawnpaw nodded and stood up, getting ready to join her Clan. "Dawnpaw!" She heard a familiar mew behind her and turned to see Silverpaw. Lionpaw also turned, standing by Dawnpaw's side. Silverpaw looked at him and looked away awkwardly. "I want to

apologize for what happened...none of us wanted her to die, we didn't want any cat to die." Silverpaw looked at her white paws. "I know she was your mentor," She glanced back up towards Lionpaw. "And your mother."

Dawnpaw noticed the pain in the she-cats eyes and she felt a pang of sadness for the poor apprentice, but before Dawnpaw could speak it was Lionpaw who stepped forward. "Don't blame yourself, Silverpaw." He said, his voice soft. "You're not the one who killed her and you're not the one who organized the battle. You were just fighting for your Clan, I can't get mad at you for that."

Silverpaw looked up at him, her eyes filled with relief. Dawnpaw looked at Lionpaw in a bit of shock, she had rarely seen him so soft before. "Thank you, Lionpaw." She purred, Lionpaw gave a small nod. Dawnpaw felt a surge of respect for the golden apprentice, after his mother's death he had been so hard on himself, but he wasn't allowing himself to be hard on Silverpaw.

"Something interesting happening?" Dawnpaw noticed Ashpaw slipping in beside Silverpaw, and he gave Dawnpaw a very toxic look. Her eyes went to his ear, it had two deep tears in it, from Dawnpaw's own teeth.

"Just talking." Lionpaw mewed, suddenly rigid again as he looked at Ashpaw. The two apprentices shared a heavy, and uncomfortable glance. Dawnpaw looked at Silverpaw who seemed just as uncomfortable. After a moment both she-cats broke out in laughter, thoroughly confused both toms.

"Something funny?" Ashpaw twitched his good ear and shared an awkward glance with Lionpaw.

"No," Silverpaw said, looking at her Clanmate with amusement in her eyes. "Come on," She nudged Ashpaw. "We should get with our Clanmates, we'll be leaving soon." After brief hesitation, and a semi-toxic glance at Lionpaw and Dawnpaw, Ashpaw followed Silverpaw towards the rest of AshClan. Dawnpaw looked at Lionpaw who looked equally as confused as Ashpaw did.

"Let's do." Dawnpaw nudged him forward and they joined with the

rest of SunClan, and headed back to their home. Dawnpaw was just happy to get into her dry nest.

Dawnpaw woke at the hiss of Thornpelt, she opened her eyes and met his amber gaze. The early morning sky peeking out just behind him, it must be dawn. "Wake up." He growled. "We're going on a dawn patrol." Dawnpaw repressed a sigh and climbed out of the apprentice den. "You too, Cinderpaw."

Cinderpaw lifted her head slowly, blinking sleep out of her eyes. She seemed confused for a moment, but after a heavy yawn she climbed out along with Dawnpaw. The morning air was chilly and bitter, raindrops slowly fell from the sky. Dawnpaw shivered and noticed she was receiving a glare from her mentor.

"If you can't handle a rainy morning then you'll never survive leaf-bare." Thornpelt growled and moved towards the front entrance of camp with her mentor and the still half-asleep Cinderpaw. Waiting at the entrance was Tigertail along with Blazeheart and Applespots. Dawnpaw felt happy that she would be patrolling with her father, as well as Cinderpaw.

"Are we ready to go?" Tigertail questioned, looking over the other three cats. Thornpelt gave a quick nod and they exited the camp. Dawnpaw walked alongside Cinderpaw towards the back of the patrol, but they all remained close together. Dawnpaw didn't have to ask to figure out where they were going, as they moved towards the AshClan border.

Dawnpaw glanced up at the sky, the sun was covered by pale gray clouds, darkening the forest even more this early in the morning. Dawnpaw looked back ahead of her, the forest was drenched in water, with leaves sloshing when she stepped on them and other plants leaving her pelt covered in rain.

She didn't like the rain, she didn't like the feeling of mud underneath her paws. However, Dawnpaw knew that the next season was leaf-bare, and the cold wasn't going away anytime soon. The patrol reached the AshClan border, and from the scent of it Dawnpaw could tell that AshClan had already made their dawn patrol. They veered away from the AshClan border, walking near

the river that separated them from the Gathering Hollow.

As they walked, a foul, bitter scent filled Dawnpaw's nose. She stopped walking, a slightly feeling of dread nagging at her. "What's that smell?" She questioned.

"Fox." Tigertail replied, twitching his tail. "And it's fresh too." He stepped forward with a sniff.

"Fox?" Cinderpaw echoed, Dawnpaw could hear the fear in her voice. Neither of the two apprentices had dealt with a fox before.

"We need to track it." Thornpelt mewed to his brother.

"I don't want Cinderpaw fighting any foxes." Blazeheart stepped forward, his voice stern. "She's barely been an apprentice for a few days, she's not ready for another cat let alone a fox."

"She won't fight." Tigertail assured him. "We're going to track the fox, and see if we can drive it off ourselves. If not, then we will go back for help. If we do end up fighting this fox, Cinderpaw will hide away and go for help if we need it and Dawnpaw," The deputy looked Dawnpaw in the eyes. "You can fight, but if you get hurt I'd like you to back off. We need to drive this fox out of the territory."

Dawnpaw nodded, suppressing her fear. She didn't know what fighting a fox would be like, how big were they? She shuddered, foxes had no warrior code, they would fight to kill or eat. Dawnpaw followed the patrol as Tigertail began tracking the fox, it led them away from the river and near the apprentice training area. Tigertail pushed through the some undergrowth, and Dawnpaw spotted the fox.

It was sitting near a tree with a dead squirrel at its paws, the squirrel's body was torn apart and the fox's muzzle was stained with blue. The creature looked ragged, it's fur dirty. The fox lifted it's head, and under the blood stains, Dawnpaw could see long, aged scars. This fox had fought before.

"It's big," Tigertail said, keeping his voice low. "But it's thin, I believe we could fight it. If it gets too much there's no shame in

running as long as we don't lead it towards camp." The rest of the patrol nodded and Tigertail looked at Cinderpaw. "I want you to stay here, stay hidden and run if we tell you to, understand?"

Cinderpaw nodded, but Dawnpaw could see the fear in her eyes. Dawnpaw wondered if she had the same fear in her eyes, she hoped her Clanmates couldn't see. "When I say, we attack." Tigertail said, and the cats around her prepare to attack. Dawnpaw looked towards her father who met her gaze, he didn't say anything but gave a reassuring nod that helped calm some of Dawnpaw's nerves.

The patrol watched the fox, it looked around for a moment, lifting its white muzzle into the air. It was searching for more food, would it scent the cats? The fox looked around, twitching its ears but turning its back on the SunClan patrol.

"Now!" Tigertail called, and the five cats burst out towards the fox. Dawnpaw followed quickly behind her father, shoving her nerves into the back of her mind. Tigertail gave a mighty leap, landing on the fox's back and digging his claws into the creature. The fox let out a cry of pain and alarm and turned to bite at Tigertail but the other cats were quickly following up.

Blazeheart went around the creature's side, slashing his claws along the fox's side. The fox growled and snapped at Blazeheart but Thornpelt and Applespots were on it's other side, clawing out clumps of red fur.

Dawnpaw's paws twitched, she unsheathed her claws and looked at the fox, looking for her own opportunity to attack. She looked at the fox's exposed legs, she learned from Thornpelt that a quick bite to the hind leg could completely drop and enemy. Dawnpaw quickly darted towards the fox and bit into its leg, feeling the tendon between her teeth.

Rather than dropping to the ground, the fox kicked it's back leg. The fox's large paw hit Dawnpaw square in the chest. The air left her chest and her paws left the ground for a moment, she hit the ground hard, landing on her shoulder scarred shoulder. Dawnpaw struggled to catch her breath and noticed that the fox had shaken off the other cats and turned to face her, and it was moving quickly.

Dawnpaw turned her head away as the fox's jaws snapped shut, inches from her face. She felt as if her heart stopped, she squeezed her eyes shut and braced herself to feel the fox's fangs in her flesh. She could feel its hot breath, rustling her fur, she felt as if she couldn't move or breathe.

The fox let out a cry and she felt it move away from her. Dawnpaw opened her eyes slightly and she saw that Tigertail and the others had pulled the fox away from her. Dawnpaw struggled to catch her breath, the fox's kick had hurt and taken the breath right out of her. She stood up, her legs shaking. Blazeheart stopped fighting and faced her. "Are you alright?" He questioned, eyes filled with concern.

Dawnpaw nodded, trying to ignore the pain in her chest. "I'm alright." He voice cracked slightly, and Blazeheart didn't seem convinced.

"Don't fight if you don't feel up to it. I'd rather you stay with Cinderpaw if you're hurt." He mewed then turned to fight the fox once more. Dawnpaw didn't follow, she didn't want to fight if she couldn't catch her breath. She watched her Clanmates, Tigertail lashed out his paw, his claws striking the creature's already scarred muzzle. Blood dripped into the ground and the fox was getting angry.

Dawnpaw could see that the fox had a few injuries, but it didn't seem to be phased. The SunClan cats also weren't very injured, but Dawnpaw could see that they were getting tired. Applespots had a small, bleeding wound on her side and Blazeheart's ear tip was bleeding. Tigertail kept lashing at the fox, only to be knocked aside but a forepaw. He hit the ground, splashing up muddy water. He let out a grunt and got back to his paws, the fox quickly coming after him.

Thornpelt went to his brother's side, but as Tigertail moved to dodge the fox he appeared to trip and hit the ground once more. Thornpelt stumbled back as the fox moved in for an attack. Tigertail couldn't get away before the fox's mouth took the deputy by his throat. Tigertail let out a cry of pain, but was cut off by a choke of pain.

"No!" Blazeheart hissed and ran at the fox, ripping his claws into its flank. The fox cried in pain and dropped Tigertail to the ground, Dawnpaw couldn't see his throat but the tabby did not get up or even move. Thornpelt and Applespots also went in harder on the fox, digging claws into its flank. The fox was clearly in pain now, batting and biting at the cats but it couldn't fight them off.

With a cry, the fox turned to run but with Thornpelt and Blazeheart quickly on it's heels. The fox and two cats vanished into the forest. Dawnpaw forced herself to stand up, her chest still aching from where she had been kicked. Applespots let the other cats run off as she went to Tigertail's side. Dawnpaw quickly padded up to the deputy and she could hear the rustle of plants as Cinderpaw left her hiding spot.

"Is he okay?" Dawnpaw questioned, Applespots was looking down at Tigertail, and after a moment she looked up with sadness in her eyes. Dawnpaw tensed and ran around to Applespot's side, blood pooled on the ground in front of Tigertail, clearly the fox's bite had been lethal.

Dawnpaw sat down, unable to keep herself upright. Tigertail was dead? Suddenly, she thought of Lionpaw and Goldenpaw, fear and sadness gripping her heart. *They just lost their mother a moon ago, how can they handle losing their father as well?*

Dawnpaw jumped to her paws when she heard the rustling of brush, she turned with claws unsheathed expecting to see the nasty face of the fox that had killed Tigertail. Instead she saw her father and her mentor. "The fox jumped the river," Thornpelt said, taking a moment to catch his breath. "We'll have to let the other Clans know that it could go to their territories."

The pale brown tom's eyes traveled behind Dawnpaw, to where Tigertail lay. His amber gaze darkened and he pushed past Dawnpaw and Applespots, lowering his head. Dawnpaw hadn't seen him like this before, would he let his sadness show through his strong exterior?

"We need to get his body back to camp." Thornpelt said, his voice low. None of the cats argued, Dawnpaw stood up and looked

toward Cinderpaw who looked horrified. *One of her first big experiences as an apprentice resulted in death, I can't imagine how she's feeling.* Pain struck her heart. *I can't imagine how Lionpaw and Goldenpaw are going to feel.* Thornpelt and Blazeheart began carrying Tigertail's body and they made their way through the forest and back to the camp.

Dawnpaw once again remained in the back of the group with Cinderpaw, and Applespots also remained towards the back. Dawnpaw noticed she was limping slightly, her wound must be bothering her. Dawnpaw let out a sigh, she wasn't looking forward to getting back to camp. Losing Tigertail so soon after losing Sunstream, it wouldn't be easy on anyone in camp let alone Lionpaw and Goldenpaw.

When they reached the camp, the sun was starting to take it's place into sunhigh. When they stepped inside, Dawnpaw's heart dropped when she noticed that Lionpaw was going up to them. "Where have you been, the dawn patrol should--" Lionpaw cut himself off, his amber eyes stuck on his father's body. Thornpelt and Blazeheart set Tigertail's body down, and Thornpelt stepped closer to his nephew.

"Lionpaw," He began to speak, but an anger blazed up in Lionpaw's eyes.

"How did this happen?" He demanded, his voice riddled with pain and his claws digging into the wet ground. "You were all patrolling with him, you should've protected him!" Dawnpaw met Lionpaw's gaze and it felt as if thorns dug into her chest, she ducked her head and flattened her ears.

"Lionpaw." Blazeheart spoke, his voice stern but gentle. "This was not the fault of any cat, we encountered a fox and had to drive it away. A fox killed your father."

"I don't care!" Lionpaw spat, he turned and ran away, paws beating on the ground, Dawnpaw felt guilt clawing at her. What if she had gone back into fight instead of resting? Could she have prevented Tigertail's death?

"What in the name of StarClan happened?" Dawnpaw heard the

voice of Flowerstar, she looked up to see the leader looking at them, pain and shock in her pale green eyes.

It was Thornpelt who stepped forward, keeping his voice steady. "We encountered a fox, Tigertail made the call to drive it away. We succeeded but unfortunately not before it took Tigertail's life."

Flowerstar dropped her head, her tail drooping on the ground. "So much death..." Her voice was barely above a whisper, but Dawnpaw heard her. She looked up. "We have to tell the Clan...we need a new deputy as soon as possible." By now, half the Clan had gathered to see what had happened, most of them seemed to knew that Tigertail was dead.

Dawnpaw heard a saddened wail, and looked over to see that Lionpaw had told his sister about their father's death. Lionpaw and Goldenpaw moved back towards Tigertail body, she couldn't bare herself to meet Lionpaw's gaze after he had blamed the entire patrol for his father's death.

"You should go see Poppyfur." Blazeheart said quietly into her ear, causing Dawnpaw to jump, she faced her father.

"I'm fine," She replied. "My chest doesn't hurt anymore." Which wasn't a lie, during the walk back the pain in her chest has lessened, she felt fine regardless of the fact that Tigertail was dead.

"Then you should get some rest for a while," He nuzzled her, but Dawnpaw didn't feel like resting. She also didn't feel like arguing with Blazeheart either. She gave a nod and turned away, she could hear the sad voices of Lionpaw and Goldenpaw, but neither of them seemed ready to talk. Dawnpaw went into the apprentice den, climbing into her nest.

The apprentice den had been rather crowded lately, but somehow it felt even worse being empty. Dawnpaw closed her eyes, trying to force herself to sleep. Her body didn't want to fall asleep however, it ached and her heart hurt for Lionpaw and Goldenpaw. As she closed her eyes, all she could hear was the barking and growling of the fox, and the cry of pain that Tigertail made before he died.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" From outside the apprentice den, Dawnpaw heard the call of Flowerstar. She lifted her head and found herself blinking sleep from her eyes, and outside the den the sun had fallen. She must have slept without realizing it, unable to shake the sounds of the fox fight from her mind.

Dawnpaw forced herself to get out of her nest and join the Clan, Flowerstar must be naming the new deputy. Dawnpaw sat beside Blazeheart who was near Windflight and Turtlepaw as well, she noticed her brother giving her a look of worry. Dawnpaw gave him a nod, letting him know she wasn't hurt, she then turned to look at Flowerstar.

"Today was tragic," Flowerstar began. "So soon after losing his mate, we lose Tigertail as well. It is incredibly saddening but as the warrior code states, we need a new deputy. It's a sad task, Tigertail had been by my side as deputy since I became leader." Dawnpaw noticed Thornpelt dropping his head, he was sitting with Bramblepelt, Rainears, Crowfur, Hawktalon and Nightwing as they mourned the loss of Tigertail. Dawnpaw had never seen Thornpelt like this, perhaps he had a soft side after all.

"But, I must now name a new deputy." Flowerstar continued. "I say these words before the spirit of Tigertail, so he may hear and approve my choice; Snakewhisker will be the new deputy of SunClan."

The gray warrior stepped forward, holding his head high and his green eyes bright. "No cat could ever replace Tigertail, but I promise I will do my best as SunClan's deputy." Dawnpaw noticed a slight falter to his voice, was he insecure about his new role?

"We will now prepare for Tigertail's vigil, then bury him beside Sunstream." Flowerstar mewed. Those two have loved each other since they were apprentices, now they are together once more in StarClan."

Dawnpaw once more thought of StarClan, she knew that Willowkit and Sunstream were up there together, and now Tigertail was with them as well. Sadness clouded her heart, and she looked towards

Lionpaw and Goldenpaw who were pressed close against each other, Dawnpaw couldn't imagine the pain they were feeling. She turned away, but noticed Poppyfur carrying Tigertail's body from the medicine cat den. This was the second vigil in such a short amount of time, and Dawnpaw decided that because of her earlier nap, she would sit this one as well.

Dawnpaw sat away from Lionpaw and Goldenpaw, staying towards her father, she sat quietly as the moon took its place in the sky. As the cold, rainy night went on Dawnpaw's thoughts wandered to the stars, wondering if Willowkit was happy in StarClan, if Sunstream and Tigertail were happy to be back together, if Dawnpaw would ever see them herself.

As the vigil ended, Dawnpaw stood up, her pelt wet and her muscles stiff. She turned and quickly began heading to the apprentice den once more, wanting this day to end. "Dawnpaw."

She heard Lionpaw's voice behind her, it was low and caused her to tense. Dawnpaw couldn't avoid him forever, so she turned to face him. His amber eyes didn't appear to be angry, just sad and exhausted. "I'm sorry for what I said when you returned to camp." He apologized. "I don't blame you or any of the others for the death of my father, I was just upset."

Dawnpaw lowered her head. "I'm sorry that your father died, he fought bravely." She wasn't sure if her words would help in the slightest, but she had to try.

"I know." Lionpaw replied. "He died a warrior's death, and now he's back with my mother." He let out a sad sigh. "I just wish both of them were here with us." Dawnpaw nodded, she wondered what it would be like if Willowkit was still here, if Sunstream was still her mentor. How different would everything be?

"We should both get some sleep." Lionpaw said, walking towards the apprentice den, after a moment, Dawnpaw followed him. He climbed into his nest and Goldenpaw soon did the same, the two siblings sleeping close together. Dawnpaw moved closer to her own brother and fell into a soundless, uncomfortable sleep.

Chapter 8

Dawnpaw flicked water droplets off her whiskers, breathing in the scent of rain as well as prey. She walked carefully on the wet soil, coating her white paws in mud. She hated the feeling, but after so much rain she had grown slightly accustomed to it. Her green eyes rested on the mouse slowly nibbling on a small seed. Without hesitation, she went for her prey, killing it quickly. She looked at her catch, soggy prey wasn't the greatest thing to eat but with how much rain the forest had getting, they didn't really have a choice.

Dawnpaw buried her catch and continued hunting, she enjoyed hunting like this. Thornpelt had wanted to go on a patrol, so he sent her to hunt and catch at least four pieces of prey. She liked hunting by herself, and she didn't have to worry about the looming threat of being punished or yelled at by her mentor. Dawnpaw had a permanent nick in hear from the amount of times Thornpelt had cuffed her over the ear for doing something wrong.

The mouse had been her second piece of prey, and she had been out here for a quite a while. As it rained, the forest grew colder and and the prey scarcer. Dawnpaw had heard Nightwing talking about how it was going to be a rough leaf-bare if this rain didn't stop. Dawnpaw wasn't sure to expect with leaf-bare but she heard stories of little prey and sickness. SunClan was working on getting as much prey as possible, so Dawnpaw could understand why Thornpelt was telling her to get a lot.

Dawnpaw moved towards the MoonClan border, keeping her eyes and nose peeled for anymore prey. She soon spotted a squirrel at the base of a tree, dropping into a crouch she prepared to leap. She had to be careful here, any sound would alert the squirrel and it would run back up the tree. Flexing her claws in the wet soil, she took a deep breath and ran forward. The squirrel started it's escape, but Dawnpaw was faster. He claws hooked into it's flesh before it make it up the tree, she pulled it down and killed it.

Feeling confident in herself, she continued hunting. After a while of not finding any prey, she grew slightly nervous. If she didn't bring back four pieces of prey Thornpelt wouldn't be happy with her. Dawnpaw continued her hunt, feeling as if she walked along the entire forest. After a long hunt, Dawnpaw caught the scent trail of another mouse. She began stalking, keeping silent until she spotted the creature. She killed it without issue and lifted her head proudly.

Dawnpaw began backtracking and going to pick up her other pieces of prey, and managed to catch another mouse along the way. When she got back to camp it was nearly sunhigh and she had been gone since morning, as she stepped back into camp she was greeted by her mentor. Thornpelt looked at her haul of prey.

"Took you long enough," He snorted. "But good job, put them on the pile." Dawnpaw nodded and walked past her mentor, going to the fresh-kill pile which had been reinforced in trying to keep the prey dry.

Feeling satisfied with herself, Dawnpaw left the pile to try and find her brother to talk to before she had more duties. Instead she found Fawnpaw face to face with Nightwing, both she-cats had bristled fur.

"I swear, you're the most careless apprentice I've ever seen, Fawnpaw!" Nightwing hissed, Dawnpaw saw Fawnpaw visibly tense with anger.

"If you're so picky about everything, maybe you should just do it yourself!" Fawnpaw spat.

"You're an apprentice! Maybe you should do your duties correctly!" Nightwing retorted, the old she-cat's blue eyes burned with anger and annoyance. "Apprentices think they're so high and mighty, but I've been in your pawprints and I was never this careless! If I gave this kind of moss to the elders we had I would've lost an eye!"

"Well then you must be capable, maybe you could do something other than sit around in the elder's den and do nothing!" Dawnpaw let out a small gasp, she knew Fawnpaw was bad tempered but was she really going that far?

"Fawnpaw!" Flowerstar's voice cut through the air like thunder. The pale brown she-cat tensed, she looked slowly over her shoulder. "I know that your parents taught you to respect not only your elders, but your Clanmates."

Fawnpaw whirled on the leader. "It's not my fault she didn't like the moss I brought!"

Flowerstar closed her eyes, Dawnpaw could see annoyance written visibly on her face. "Fawnpaw, you realize that today is yours and Adderpaw's warrior ceremony, correct?"

Dawnpaw saw the worry on Fawnpaw's face, was it really going to be their ceremony today?

Fawnpaw didn't respond, she just nodded. "After all these moons of collecting moss you'd think you would know how to do it by now. I've seen better moss *and* hunting from Yarrowpaw and Cinderpaw." Flowerstar's words were harsh, Dawnpaw could see Fawnpaw wincing as if she had been struck. "Maybe you're not ready to be a warrior."

Fawnpaw jumped forward, her green eyes wide with alarm. "No! I'm ready to be a warrior!"

Flowerstar shook her head. "I don't think you are, clearly you need to work on your attitude and respect towards your fellow Clanmates. Not only will you not be earning your warrior name today, but you will only be collecting moss and caring for the queens and elders, though I hope you don't treat your siblings the same way you've treated Nightwing."

Fawnpaw stood with her jaw dropped, she looked hurt. "Flowerstar please--" She began pleading.

"*Enough.*" Flowerstar cut her off harshly. "This is my decision, if you make an attitude improvement and start respecting your Clanmates, then you'll earn your warrior name before you know it, but not today." The leader turned away with a flick of her tail, signalling the end of the conversation. The entire Clan had watched the engagement between them, and none of SunClan really knew what

to say.

Dawnpaw turned away, not wanting to take a chance that Fawnpaw would take her anger out on her. She supposed she would wait for Adderpaw's warrior ceremony, as far as she knew that would still be happening today. Soon, after Fawnpaw had moved from her spot of being shocked, she left to camp, presumably to get more moss and also to avoid Adderpaw's ceremony. It wasn't long before Adderpaw returned to camp and Flowerstar called the meeting. Dawnpaw heard the complaints of kits as the Clan gathered and looked over to see Willownose struggling to reign in Flamekit, Heatherkit and Brackenkit. Flamekit was a fiery ginger she-cat, Heatherkit had soft brown fur, and Brackenkit had dark brown fur that normally stuck up in all directions. Eventually, Willownose managed to get them back in the nursery and sat outside to watch them, what did she think? That he daughter managed to get out of her warrior ceremony, it was normally a very proud day for parents.

"Today we are welcoming a brand new warrior into SunClan," Flowerstar began, Dawnpaw could tell she felt slightly uncomfortable. She probably wasn't happy about holding back Fawnpaw's warrior ceremony, but Dawnpaw figured she had to handle some harder duties as leader, including punishing warriors when needed. Dawnpaw noticed Bramblepelt sitting beside Thornpelt, Bramblepelt's look was stoic, yet calm and Thornpelt looked as annoyed as ever. Dawnpaw suppressed a laugh, Fawnpaw was more like Thornpelt than her actual father.

"Adderpaw, step forward." Flowerstar continued and the silver striped apprentice stood forward. Dawnpaw would miss Adderpaw in the apprentice den, he was kind and funny, but she was happy for him. "I Flowerstar, leader of SunClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice, for he has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn." Flowerstar jumped down from the SunTree and faced Adderpaw.

"Adderpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Adderpaw's voice was steady.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Adderpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Adderstrike. StarClan honors your courage and wit, and we welcome you as a full member of SunClan." Flowerstar rested her muzzle on Adderstrike's muzzle, and Dawnpaw a noticed a certain tenderness in her eyes, something she hadn't see in Redclaw and Squirreltail's ceremony, then Flowerstar remembered that Adderstrike was the son of Stormwind, Flowerstar's sister and he was Flowerstar's nephew.

"Adderstrike! Adderstrike! Adderstrike!" The Clan cheered their new warrior and Dawnpaw felt the same buzz of excitement in her paws as when Redclaw and Squirreltail became warriors, and she started longing for her own warrior ceremony. However, she had a long ways to go before she finally earned her warrior name.

The next day, Fawnpaw seemed to have calmed down over being denied her warrior ceremony, but Dawnpaw could still see that she was even more irritable than normal. Dawnpaw did her best to leave her alone, in any other situation, Dawnpaw would sympathy for the she-cat, but Fawnpaw wasn't the kindest cat, and he needed to learn some manners. Dawnpaw had been taught since she was a kit to respect her elders, and Fawnpaw seemed to have forgotten that.

Dawnpaw sat in camp, the sun slowly rising. Thornpelt had woken her up at dawn for once, but this normally meant he had something planned for her. Sure enough, as she thought this, her mentor approached her. "Where are the other apprentices?"

The other apprentices? Dawnpaw tilted her head. "Turtlepaw is giving prey to the kits, Fawnpaw is getting moss with Cinderpaw and Yarrowpaw and I think Goldenpaw and Lionpaw are out hunting."

"Poppyfur and Pebblepaw needs herbs." Thornpelt explained, "But they're busy cleaning the medicine cat den or something so I said I'd help and send some apprentices out to collect some for them."

"But all the apprentices?" Dawnpaw questioned, wondering why they needed so many apprentices just for herbs.

Thornpelt's eyes flashed annoyance. "Because the rain could easily kill the herbs they need, don't question what I tell you to do." Dawnpaw flicked her ears but gave a nod, Thornpelt turned away and walked towards the entrance of camp right as Goldenpaw and Lionpaw entered the camp. He stopped and talked to them for a moment before he left the camp.

Dawnpaw met Lionpaw's gaze who seemed a bit confused but the two of them padded up to her. It had been over a moon since Tigertail's death, and Dawnpaw noticed that were doing better, but she could still the shadows of grief in their eyes from time to time.

"Did Thornpelt tell you the same thing?" He questioned. Dawnpaw nodded. "Seems odd, but I guess if they need a lot of herbs, a lot of cats are the way to do it."

"But at Jagged Rocks?" Goldenpaw tilted her head. "Most apprentices aren't allowed to go by themselves, if a cat gets too high up they could slip and fall, there's adders and it's so close to the AshClan border."

Lionpaw nudged his sister comfortingly. "We won't climb too high, the adders should be gone from the rain and we won't cross the border. Simple as that." Despite his words, Dawnpaw could see doubt flickering in Goldenpaw's eyes.

"Alright." She mewed, her tone uneasy. "I suppose we should go get the others." Lionpaw and Dawnpaw agreed and the three of them picked up Turtlepaw when he finished giving prey to the kits, and then moved out of camp to get Fawnpaw, Cinderpaw and Yarrowpaw, then continued on towards Jagged Rocks.

In the few days that had passed since Fawnpaw had been denied her warrior ceremony, she had become even worse to be around. She was snappy and always complained. *You're not going to get a warrior ceremony like that.* Dawnpaw thought with a snort.

"So how's the training going?" Dawnpaw jumped slightly, she hadn't noticed that Lionpaw was walking beside her now.

"Oh," She replied, looking ahead and not wanting to talk about her

strict mentor. "It's fine, I suppose."

"Why just fine?" Lionpaw questioned. "I noticed you've got a bit of a nick on your ear. Training accident."

Not exactly an accident. She said silently. "Yeah," She replied. "Thornpelt is a rough mentor."

"What do you mean?"
"He punishes me if I do anything less than his definition of perfect. He makes me trains for so long and is never satisfied. I'm always tired and sore." Dawnpaw replied, trying to keep her voice low. She didn't want every other apprentice hearing her complain, but she trusted Lionpaw.

"Well it seems to be paying off." Lionpaw pointed out. Dawnpaw looked at him in confusion. *Paying off?*

"What?" She questioned.

"Look at yourself." LIonpaw mewed. "You're strong, you've got more muscles than Turtlepaw. You always bring back the most prey while hunting and you could take on Ashpaw, who is much older and bigger than you. I bet you could fight a warrior at this rate."

Dawnpaw blinked, she hadn't exactly thought about how the training had been affecting her, other than that it was hard and exhausting.

"Thornpelt may be a harsh mentor, but I'd say that harshness is paying off. It's not like his attitude is wearing off on you." Lionpaw added, then met her gaze with sparkling amber eyes. "You're still one of the most caring cats I know." Dawnpaw felt her pelt grow hot, she looked away from him.

"Thanks, I guess." She lowered her head, unsure of what to say in response to that. Luckily, they were nearing Jagged Rocks. The forest slowly thinned out into a large, open field. In this field was Jagged Rocks, a rock formation that stuck out of the grown like large claws. As the apprentices approached it, they stopped for a moment

"What kind of herbs are we supposed to gather around here?" Turtlepaw questioned, looking around.

"Pebblepaw told me that yarrow, chervil and chickweed grow around here." Yarrowpaw replied.

"Remember to be careful around here." Lionpaw spoke up. "Don't fall and don't cross the border." He mewed, the apprentices nodded and they started splitting up around the rocks to find herbs. Dawnpaw moved towards the bottom of the rocks where she found some chervil, from her time in the medicine cat den she knew that both the root and the leaves were useful.

As Dawnpaw began to pull up the plant, Lionpaw caused her to jump once more. "You're really jumpy today." He chuckled and began gathering the herb with her. *I'm always jumpy.* Dawnpaw flicked her tail, but didn't respond. She didn't understand why Lionpaw was always talking to *her*, instead of his sister or another apprentice. "Sorry if I was being a bit pushy when asking about Thornpelt."

Dawnpaw looked away from her herbs and at him. "It's fine." She replied. "It didn't bother me."

"That's good." Lionpaw purred then looked at his herbs. "You know, he may seem like he's a badger pretending to be a cat, but ever since my father died both him and Bramblepelt have been looking after me and Goldenpaw when we need it."

"Really?" Dawnpaw could understand Bramblepelt, but Thornpelt? She didn't see him as the "fatherly" type.

Lionpaw nodded. "It's been helpful, knowing that I still have cats like that who love me and want to see me succeed like Tigertail did." There was flash of sadness in his eyes, but before Dawnpaw could reply she heard a cry of alarm from Yarrowpaw. The two of them jumped to their paws and ran to see what was happening.

The small gray apprentice had climbed a bit higher than he should have and Dawnpaw came around just in time to watch him fall and land on the forest floor. Panic struck her like lightning, but it

quickly ebbed when she saw Yarrowpaw stand up.

"Are you okay?" Cinderpaw asked, concern lining her mew. Yarrowpaw gave a nod and shook his pelt clean.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Yarrowpaw replied.

"This is interesting." Dawnpaw's fur stood on end as behind Yarrowpaw, an AshClan patrol slipped out of the trees with Echoheart at the front of it. Yarrowpaw spun around in alarm and Dawnpaw realized that when he had fallen, he had fallen on the other side of the border. Echoheart looked at Yarrowpaw as if he was a piece of prey. "SunClan apprentices on the wrong side of the border."

"I-I'm sorry." Yarrowpaw scrambled backwards across the border and back onto SunClan territory. "It was an accident, I fell from the rocks."

"Now how can I believe that?" Echoheart questioned. "For all I know SunClan apprentices could be freely roaming onto AshClan territory, this border isn't check as often as it should be."

Lionpaw stepped forward, standing beside Yarrowpaw. "He didn't mean to cross the border." His voice was steady and dangerous. "SunClan cats actually respect borders."

Echoheart's eyes flashed. "And yet I found a hunting apprentice on the wrong side of the border."

"You found a group of apprentices gathering herbs and one of them accidently crossed the border by falling." Lionpaw sounded like a warrior while he faced Echoheart.

"You have a lot of courage for a little apprentice." Echoheart sneered and Dawnpaw noticed the cats around her were moving closer. Dawnpaw tried to remember each of their names, she recalled Lilyclaw, Graypelt, Mudthorn, Cloverstrike, Ratpelt and Crowstep. She felt unease pricking at her pelt, she didn't like the look in their eyes.

Echoheart looked down at Lionpaw with malice deep in her eyes,

but Lionpaw didn't back down. "I've got a lot more courage than you, *murderer*." Dawnpaw could hear the hatred and anger in his voice as he faced the she-cat who killed his mother.

"Oh was that your mother I killed?" Echoheart sneered, the tone in her voice made Dawnpaw unsheathe her claws and made anger twinge her paws. Echoheart didn't have any remorse for killing Sunstream. "I was only doing my duty."

"You *duty* cost you your deputy position, at least my father was a noble deputy." Echoheart moved like lightning, he claws flashed and Lionpaw stumbled backwards with a slight cry of alarm.

"Lionpaw!" Both Goldenpaw and Dawnpaw cried his name, Dawnpaw saw blood dripping on the ground.

"Attack!" Echoheart gave the call for her patrol and seconds later, the AshClan cats were swarming over the border and onto the apprentices. Dawnpaw started running to Lionpaw's side, but she was overcome by a large weight. She felt claws digging into her fur and she bit back a cry of pain.

Dawnpaw struggled under the warrior's weight, but kicked with her hind paws and dug her claws firmly into the body of her attacker and raked them downwards. She heard the cry of pain of a she-cat and she let her grip on Dawnpaw ease. Dawnpaw squirmed away and saw that she had been attacked by Lilyclaw. The silver she-cat was back on her paws in just a moment and there was a dangerous glint in her eyes.

Dawnpaw attacked before she could, going for the she-cats legs to knock her down again. With claws out she swiped at Lilyclaw's forelegs, but she she-cat stepped backwards to avoid her attack, before Dawnpaw could pull back she Lilyclaw lashed out, her claws scratching just above Dawnpaw's eyes. She fell back in alarm and winced in pain as blood trickled into her eyes.

With claws out and a deep breath, Dawnpaw made another attack. She put all of her strength into her haunches and jumped onto Lilyclaw's back, digging her claws deep into the she-cats shoulders. Lilyclaw hissed and started doing her beck to buck Dawnpaw off of

her, but each time she did, Dawnpaw dug her claws deep into her flesh.

Finally, Lilyclaw managed to displace Dawnpaw, she fell to the ground hard and had to roll away from another attack. Her body ached but she stood up, there was a flash a golden fur and Lionpaw attacked Lilyclaw before she could land another hit on Dawnpaw. Dawnpaw took a moment to catch her breath, but it didn't last she felt claws dig into her shoulders and she was thrown to the side. A large rock stabbed into Dawnpaw's side and she let out a small yelp of pain, when Dawnpaw faced her attacker she saw that it was Echoheart.

The former AshClan deputy was large and fast, Dawnpaw didn't have time to run or avoid her as Echoheart closed in on her. Echoheart pinned Dawnpaw to the ground, and bit down hard on her already scarred shoulder. Pain ripped through Dawnpaw's body, she cried out in pain and dug her claws into Echoheart's fur, clumsily raking them down her side. Pain and blood blurred her vision, she tried her best to pull away but the AshClan she-cat was much stronger than even Lilyclaw.

Echoheart released her grip on Dawnpaw's shoulder for a moment and Dawnpaw allowed herself to claw at the she-cat and get away. When she finally scrambled away, she noticed that blood was spilling from her shoulder at her alarming rate. She had to ignore the pain, she had to fight.

Dawnpaw attacked the same time Echoheart did, but Echoheart simply knocked her to the ground once more. Dawnpaw struggled more and more each time to get up, but she forced herself to stand. Her legs trembled and her shoulder burned, but she did not back down.

"Scared little kitty?" Echoheart sneered and attacked again, shoving Dawnpaw to the ground once more. Panic swelled in Dawnpaw, she didn't have the energy to fight Echoheart much longer.

In the distance, Dawnpaw heard a shout and heard more cries than just the AshClan warriors and the apprentices. Dawnpaw slowly lifted her head and saw that Thornpelt and more SunClan warriors

had arrived, her mentor had pulled Echoheart off Dawnpaw and pinned her to the ground.

Dawnpaw looked around, spotting Bramblepelt, Sandfoot, Icepetal, Rustpelt, and Snakewhisker swarming the AshClan warriors and pulling them off the apprentices. The SunClan apprentices looked much more battered than the AshClan warriors did. Cinderpaw bled from a torn ear and a wound on her foreleg, Turtlepaw had blood trailing down his face, Fawnpaw was missing patches of fur and had a long scratch down her flank, Goldenpaw had several wounds along her flank, Lionpaw had a wound on his chest and Yarrowpaw looked the worst.

He stood trembling with multiple, heavily bleeding wounds on his chest, shoulders and flank. Dawnpaw struggled to stand up while the SunClan warriors attacked the AshClan warriors. Dawnpaw looked over and saw Lionpaw running over to her with concern in his eyes.

"Are you alright? I'm so sorry I left you to deal with Echoheart." His eyes went to her shoulder.

Dawnpaw gave a small, weak nod. "I'm alright." She assured him, then watched as the AshClan warriors fled back over the border.

"Run, cowards!" Thornpelt taunted with a flash in his eyes.

Echoheart stopped running and turned to face Thornpelt. "I am no coward, Thornpelt." She spat.

"That's why you fight a group of apprentices?" He questioned. "Maybe you were too scared to take on a full grown warrior."

Echoheart hissed. "They crossed the border!"

"It was an accident you mangepelt!" Lionpaw spat, Dawnpaw could hear the anger in his voice.

Thornpelt raised his tail to silence the golden apprentice and stepped closer to the border. "I'm sure you must've been so threatened by a group of apprentices carrying herbs. Honestly, Echoheart, with how you've been acting Lionstar must think the

made a kit to be his deputy. It's a blessing that Riverstorm is deputy now."

Echoheart's eyes blazed with rage. "You watch yourself, Thornpelt! I was the best deputy AshClan ever had!"

With a lash of her tail, Echoheart led her patrol back into the pine trees, Dawnpaw let out a sigh of relief. "Are you alright?" Dawnpaw looked up to see Thornpelt looking down at her, his eyes showed a small trace of concern.

She nodded. "I'm fine." She replied and stood up, her shoulder still burning with pain. Thornpelt gave a nod and looked around at the apprentices.

"Let's get you all home, I'm proud you all fought so fiercely." Thornpelt mewed and began leading all the warriors and apprentices back to camp. Dawnpaw padded up to her brother, who looked just as exhausted as she felt.

"Are you alright?" She questioned, looking at the wound on his head, but the blood seemed to be drying.

"Yes," Turtlepaw nodded. "Are you?" He asked, his green eyes traveling to her shoulder. Dawnpaw nodded and she could see the relief visibly on his face. They walked back together, Dawnpaw wanted to stay close to her brother right now. She could see that her fellow apprentices were doing the same thing. Lionpaw and Goldenpaw were together and Cinderpaw was helping Yarrowpaw walk, Dawnpaw felt her heart twist. *I hope Yarrowpaw will be okay.*

When the cats reach camp, they were greeted by shocked expressions, but the apprentices didn't stop to answer questions they just went to the medicine cat den. When they stepped inside Poppyfur turned around in shock. "What in the name of StarClan happened to you all?" Pebblepaw looked around in alarm and rushed to her brother, helping him into a nest.

"We were out collecting herbs out at Jagged Rocks when an AshClan patrol attacked us." Lionpaw explained, Dawnpaw looked at him. Despite the fight, he seemed to have more energy than the

rest of them.

Poppyfur turned her gaze to Thornpelt. "I asked you to send an apprentice or two to get herbs, not *all* of them. Are you an idiot?" Dawnpaw held back a gasp, she had never heard any cat speak to Thornpelt that way.

Thornpelt narrowed his eyes. "Don't speak to me that--"

"I'll speak to you anyway I want!" Poppyfur spat, her fur bristling. "You send all of our apprentices to one of the most dangerous places in the territory and bring them back to me half-dead! You're one of the biggest mouse-brains I've ever met, get out of my den!" Dawnpaw was shocked at the rage in the medicine cat's voice, then she supposed that it would be hard for two medicine cats to treat all the apprentices, and it would use a lot of herbs.

When Thornpelt turned away with a growl, Poppyfur let out a sigh. "Alright," She said. "Which of you is the worst?"

Chapter 9

Rain fell lazily from the sky, but it hadn't stopped in days and the forest and all its inhabitants were soaked. Dawnpaw had enjoyed her few days off from training since the AshClan patrol attacked her and the other apprentices. Most of them were injured to a point where they couldn't train. Lionpaw and Cinderpaw were the only exceptions, and Fawnpaw had already been taken off her apprentice duties. Meanwhile, Yarrowpaw was the only one who had to actually stay in the medicine cat den for his wounds. Dawnpaw visited him from time to time, and knew he was recovering quickly but with a few scars. Pebblepaw enjoyed having him around, Dawnpaw knew that much.

Dawnpaw wished she could hide inside the apprentice den all day to avoid the rain, but she did have a few apprentice duties that she still had to attend to. She grabbed a large rabbit from the fresh-kill pile to take to Willownose and her kits. She was currently the only queen, and her kits had lots of room to play. Dawnpaw enjoyed visited the kits, they were very fun and playful.

When Dawnpaw reached the nursery, she noticed that the kits were playing inside while Willownose rested in the far corner of the den, keeping a close eye on them. Flamekit was the first to notice her, and her eyes sparkled. "Dawnpaw!" She exclaimed and bounded over to the apprentice, Brackenkit and Heatherkit close on her paws. "Is that for us?" She questioned.

Dawnpaw nodded and looked over at Willownose. "And for your mother, I figure it's big enough to feed all of you."

Willownose stood up from her nest in the corner, gave a hearty yawn and padded over to the rabbit. "Thank you, Dawnpaw." She purred.

"What's it like being an apprentice?" Heatherpaw asked as she took a large bite of the rabbit.

"It's fun." Dawnpaw purred, watching the kit's faces light up. "But it's also hard work, there's a lot of training. It's worth it, though."

"I want to be an apprentice." Brackenkit mewed, holding his head high. "I'd be the best apprentice!"

"Not if you trip over those big, clumsy paws of yours." Flamekit gave him a playful shove. Brackenkit stuck his nose in the air and Dawnpaw let out a purr of amusement. Dawnpaw was enjoying watching the kits when she heard Thornpelt's mew behind her, she turned to see her mentor standing outside the nursery. She wasn't supposed to be training yet, what did he want?

"Flowerstar wants to speak with you." Thornpelt mewed, his eyes going to the kits for just a moment.

"Flowerstar?" Dawnpaw echoed, why did she want to talk to her? Regardless, Dawnpaw stood up, bid farewell to the kits and exited the nursery. "What does Flowerstar want to talk to me about?" She questioned.

"You'll see when you get there." Thornpelt replied curtly, Dawnpaw flicked her ears and walked with her mentor to the SunTree. She looked inside and saw that it wasn't just Flowerstar, but Lionpaw, Goldenpaw and Turtlepaw. Even more confused, Dawnpaw stepped inside.

"Good, everyone's here." Flowerstar nodded at Dawnpaw and Thornpelt, Dawnpaw sat down between her brother and Lionpaw. "As you may know, every apprentice takes a trip to the Moonstone sometime before they become a warrior. Lionpaw and Goldenpaw will be warriors soon and they haven't been there yet, so I decided that along with them, Dawnpaw and Turtlepaw could come along as well."

Dawnpaw's eyes widened slightly, the Moonstone? Her paws tingled, she had only heard small stories about the Moonstone, the sacred place where the Clan cats spoke with their warrior ancestors.

"That sounds exciting." Goldenpaw purred to her brother and Lionpaw's eyes lit up like the sun.

"It's quite the experience for any apprentice." Flowerstar mewed softly. "And I spoke with Poppyfur, you're all cleared for the journey but you'll have to get some travelling herbs from her, it's a long journey."

The gray leader dismissed the four apprentices and they all headed towards Poppyfur's and Pebblepaw's den. Dawnpaw had a new energy in paws, she couldn't wait to see the Moonstone, and she would be going outside SunClan's territory, even farther than the Gathering Hollow.

Inside Poppyfur's den, Pebblepaw was sitting with Yarrowpaw and talking closely with him. She looked up when she saw the other four apprentices. "Hi there." She greeted kindly. "Are you here for your travelling herbs.?" The apprentices nodded and Pebblepaw bounded over to Poppyfur who looked at her apprentice expectantly.

"Do you remember what herbs we use in travelling herbs?" Poppyfur questioned.

Pebblepaw thought for a moment. "Burnet, chamomile, daisy and sorrell." Dawnpaw could see the confidence in her eyes and Poppyfur nodded. "Correct, now go make them their own bundles." Pebblepaw gave an eager nod and bounded towards the herb store. Dawnpaw felt a rush of warmth knowing that Pebblepaw was happy in her position, one of her fears was that she would regret not being a warrior, but Dawnpaw could see that she was enjoying her role.

After a few moments, Pebblepaw returned with four small herb bundles. She passed one to each of the apprentices and Dawnpaw ate hers, she swallowed the bitter taste and looked at her fellow apprentices. Lionpaw made a face at the herbs, but swallowed them anyway. Dawnpaw could see a distant fire in his eyes, he would become a warrior soon. Dawnpaw looked away, she still had several moons before that happened for her.

Dawnpaw followed the other apprentices outside while they waited for Flowerstar and Thornpelt. Dawnpaw wasn't sure why Thornpelt out of all the other mentors was the one to join along, she would

much prefer Sandfoor or Rainears or even Rustpelt. She didn't argue however, she knew better than that. Flowerstar exited her dawn with Thornpelt beside her, she looked towards the apprentices and beckoned them forward.

"Do any of you know the way we have to go for the Moonstone?" She quizzed them, her green eyes sparkling.

"We go through MoonClan territory right?" Goldenpaw questioned. When Flowerstar nodded, Dawnpaw couldn't help but feel slightly shocked. They would be in another Clan's territory?

"We have an agreement with MoonClan about going to the Moonstone," Flowerstar explained. "We can cross the river and as long as we walk across the bank we're fine. Just don't stray too far, and I'd hope you all know to not take prey." All four apprentices nodded. "Then we're off." Flowerstar turned, her head and tail high as she led the five cats out of the camp.

Dawnpaw followed eagerly, her mind wandering. She had smelled MoonClan before at the gathering, but she wondered what their territory smelled like. She had only seen what it looked from across the river, and she supposed she wouldn't be seeing much more. It was still exciting nonetheless.

They made their way through SunClan's territory, Dawnpaw wish she could run ahead, she wanted so badly to see the Moonstone. As she walked, Lionpaw fell in beside her. "This is exciting, right?" He questioned, amber eyes ablaze.

Dawnpaw nodded. "It is, I'm so excited to see the Moonstone." Her paws twitched with anticipation. "Are you?"

Lionpaw looked ahead. "From what Fawnpaw and the other apprentices told me from when they came here is that Flowerstar choses one apprentice to come with her into the cave to see the Moonstone. When Redclaw, Squirreltail, Adderstrike and Fawnpaw all went, she picked Redclaw."

"Oh," Dawnpaw replied, feeling her excitement fade a little. Who would Flowerstar pick? Probably one of the older apprentices, she

felt her spirits drop but she was still excited to be going on this journey at all. "It's still exciting, even if I don't get to see the Moonstone." She replied, keeping her head high.

"That's true." Lionpaw purred, the way his eyes glowed made Dawnpaw's pelt burn. She looked ahead and noticed that Turtlepaw was looking over at them with narrowed eyes. She shot him a confused look and her brother turned away. The walk through SunClan was easy, then they reached the river.

Dawnpaw's eyes went to the large branch that served as a bridge for the cats. "This is where we cross into MoonClan territory. It's sturdy, but still use caution when crossing. The river is particularly high right now and I don't think any of you know how to swim." Flowerstar went first, carefully crossing the branch one paw at a time until she was safely on the other side.

"Watch and learn." Lionpaw whispered to Dawnpaw with a laugh and he confidently crossed the branch. Goldenpaw followed, a bit more hesitant but crossed safely. Turtlepaw went after her, crossing successfully. Thornpelt urged Dawnpaw to go next, and she swallowed her fears.

Dawnpaw placed a tentative paw on the branch, and felt that it was sturdy. She could feel Thornpelt close behind her and she forced herself to cross. When she was on the branch it suddenly felt much longer, she could feel the angry river lapping at her paws. She stook another step and panic surged through her when the back of the stick slip into the water.

With a cry of Dawnpaw jumped off the branch, sending it splashing into the river. Luckily, Dawnpaw's jump was strong enough to get her to the other side. Turtlepaw rushed to her side. "Are you okay?" He asked frantically. Dawnpaw nodded, trying to calm her racing heartbeat. She noticed Flowerstar stepping closer to the river.

"I thought it was stronger, my apologies Dawnpaw." Flowerstar looked over at Thornpelt who was still on the other side of the river. "Can you cross?" She questioned.

Thornpelt nodded and back up a bit, he narrowed his amber eyes

and ran forward at full speed. With a large jump, he cleared the river easily. Dawnpaw watched in shock as her mentor landed gracefully on the other side. She knew her mentor was strong, but that impressed her.

"We should wait here for a MoonClan patrol," Flowerstar suggested. "Maybe they know another way to cross, I don't think the apprentices can make a jump like that." While they waited, Dawnpaw looked around MoonClan territory, it was mostly moorland, with a thin line of forest around the other edges. After a few moments, a dark gray tom pushed his ways out of the trees followed by a patrol of MoonClan warriors.

Dawnpaw recognized the cat leading the patrol as Shadowpelt, and his apprentice Bonepaw. Behind him was Jayfur, Frostfire, Mosspaw and Feathercloud. Shadowpelt looked at the SunClan cats with confusion then quickly approached them. "Flowerstar?" He looked at the apprentices then back at Flowerstar. "What brings you to MoonClan territory."

"Greeting, Shadowpelt." She dipped her head respectfully. "I apologize for this, but we were on our way to the Moonstone as part of these four apprentices journey, and while we were crossing the river the branch we used to cross gave out. We were wondering if there were any other methods of crossing the river."

"Other than swimming." Thornpelt made sure to add.

Shadowpelt thought for a moment. "I'm not sure myself, but I could ask Crowstar. Continue on to the Moonstone and I'll make sure that the information gets relayed to all MoonClan cats, and whatever patrol is out at the time you get out will show you."

"Thank you, Shadowpelt." Flowerstar dipped her head once more and the SunClan group turned away. To Dawnpaw, it felt strange seeing MoonClan cats outside of the gatherings, but they were much kinder than AshClan. Dawnpaw suppressed a shudder as she remembered not only the AshClan battle that took Sunstream's life, but the patrol that attacked the apprentices. *Both led by Echoheart.* Dawnpaw couldn't help but think, that she-cat was bad news. Dawnpaw figured she would've learned her lesson by attacking

innocent SunClan cats when she lost her position as deputy.

They moved through MoonClan territory and Dawnpaw felt slightly uncomfortable in this territory. It was unfamiliar to her, and she missed the forest. At least the forest provided shelter from the cold and the rain, MoonClan was just exposed to the elements. Dawnpaw couldn't imagine what their camp was like. In the distance, Dawnpaw saw tall, white trees rising up in the distance, something about them made Dawnpaw feel uneasy. The SunClan cats reached another river, this one significantly smaller.

"How do MoonClan live surrounded by rivers?" Lionpaw asked with a flick of his tail.

"We have two rivers surrounded our territory." Turtlepaw pointed out, his tone dry and Lionpaw shot him a look. Dawnpaw suppressed a laugh and looked at the river.

"This river is much easier to cross. Flowerstar made a small leap across, and the other apprentices followed. Dawnpaw made the jump with ease and it was no surprise that Thornpelt did as well.

The sun was starting to fall from the sky and night was taking over. Dawnpaw hadn't realized they were walking for so long, but she didn't feel exhausted. Poppyfur's herbs must've really worked. They stepped closer to the white trees, and with how the late night light was reflecting off of them, the trees appeared to be glowing. The entirety of this sparse, glowing forest made Dawnpaw feel uneasy, she felt as if eyes were watching her from all directions.

"Welcome to the Spirit Woods." Flowerstar said. "When the moon is highest, the trees appear to glow even brighter than they do now. It's quite a beautiful sight." She explained. "Though this is considered neutral territory, most cats refer to it as StarClan's territory. The Spirit Tree isn't far ahead, and that's what holds the Moonstone."

"Wait--" Goldenpaw mewed. "The Moonstone is in a *tree?*" She asked, Dawnpaw couldn't believe it herself.

Flowerstar nodded. "The Spirit Tree is much like the SunTree back

home. Whereas the SunTree serves as my den, the Spirit Tree leads into a dark cavern where the Moonstone is, it's also much larger."

Dawnpaw narrowed her eyes, looking ahead for the Spirit Tree. She figured she would recognize it when she saw it. They walked through the Spirit Woods for quite a while, it was almost moonhigh by the time Dawnpaw saw the giant tree looming up in the distance. It was the same color as the other trees, but much larger. It's roots tore from the ground like claws, and they twisted open to reveal a large cave.

"This is it." Flowerstar said, then faced the apprentices. "The leader always takes one apprentice in with them when they visit the Moonstone. We chose the apprentice by not only their skills in hunting and fighting, but their patience and spirit. Dawnpaw didn't think for a moment that Flowerstar would chose her, that is until the leader rested her green eyes on Dawnpaw. "Dawnpaw, I'd like you to join me in the Moonstone cavern."

Dawnpaw eyes widened. "Me?" She questioned, looking over at the other apprentices. None of them seemed jealous, instead they all looked proud of her, especially Turtlepaw. Flowerstar gave a nod, her eyes soft. Dawnpaw stepped forward, standing beside Flowerstar.

"Are you ready?" She questioned and Dawnpaw gave a shaky nod and they moved towards the the opening of the Spirit Tree's cave, which led into pitch blackness. Dawnpaw ignored the fear clawing at her heart, swallowed her nerves and stepped into the darkness. The entrance led into a very narrow cave, she could feel her whiskers brushing the edge of the tunnel, she could sense Flowerstar ahead of her, but Dawnpaw couldn't help but feel herself being trapped. Dawnpaw had to force herself not to panic and run out of the tunnel, what would Flowerstar and the others think if she did?

Dawnpaw stuck on her path and followed Flowerstar deeper into the tunnel, eventually she could see a light in the distance, illuminating Flowerstar's outline and shadow. The tunnel grew wider and finally opened into a cavern. In the center of this cavern was a large, shimmering stone. Dawnpaw's eyes widened and her

jaw dropped as she saw the beautiful stone.

She noticed Flowerstar look at her with amusement in her eyes, so Dawnpaw forced her mouth shut and looked away bashfully. "This is the Moonstone," Flowerstar spoke, her voice was eerie in this dark cave. Flowerstar looked at the Moonstone, Dawnpaw could swear she saw Silverpelt reflected in her green eyes. "When leaders or medicine cats come here, they touch their nose to the stone and share dreams with StarClan. You won't be doing that, however." Flowerstar moved towards the Moonstone, then gave a glance over her shoulder. "Maybe one day."

Dawnpaw wasn't sure what she meant but she watched as Flowerstar laid down and touched her nose to the surface of the Moonstone, after a few short moments the leader's body went stiff and she relaxed into sleep. Now Dawnpaw was essentially alone in this cavern, and she couldn't take her eyes off the Moonstone. She also laid down, tucking her paws under her chest.

As Dawnpaw watched the Moonstone, she felt mesmerized by the shimmering, almost as if stars were trapped inside of a crystal. Dawnpaw's eyes felt heavy, but she didn't notice herself slipping off into sleep.

Dawnpaw awoke in the Spirit Woods, surrounded by the haunting trees. She stood up, looked around and tried to figure out why she was here. Dawnpaw started to feel uncomfortable and somewhat scared until she saw a faint glow ahead of her. Dawnpaw watched as a shimmering, golden she-cat stepped into view.

"Sunstream?" Dawnpaw called out, feeling a wave of warmth and joy as she saw her old mentor. However, as Dawnpaw moved closer to the she-cat she noticed that this cat was smaller and more slender than Sunstream. "You're not Sunstream." Dawnpaw replied, stopping in her tracks. Even though this she-cat wasn't Sunstream, Dawnpaw couldn't help but be comforted by her presence.

"No, I'm not." The she-cat mewed, her voice soft as down. "Sunstream is my sister, my name is Honeywing."

"Honeywing?" Dawnpaw echoed, recalling her first day as

apprentice when Sunstream told Dawnpaw about her sister. "You were the medicine cat before Poppyfur."

Honeywing nodded. "That's correct, I'm glad Sunstream told you about me." Dawnpaw tilted her head.

"Why is that? I don't understand why you're even visiting me..." Dawnpaw looked at her paws. "If any StarClan cat were to visit me I didn't think it would be a cat I didn't know.."

"You want it to be Willowkit, don't you?"

Dawnpaw looked up, unable to hide the fact that it was true. Dawnpaw longed to see her sister, and now she was talking to a StarClan cat but it wasn't the StarClan cat she would ever thought she'd meet.

"I'm sorry I'm not the cat you wanted to see." Dawnpaw opened her mouth to tell the she-cat not to apologize but Honeywing spoke first. "But I promise that Willowkit is safe, happy and very proud of you."

Dawnpaw felt a familiar pain in her heart as she thought of Willowkit, was she really happy? Living in StarClan all alone? Dawnpaw flattened her ears and avoided Honeywing's green gaze.

"And Sunstream is proud of you too." Honeywing added, pulling Dawnpaw's gaze back to her. "She talks all the time about how well you and her kits are doing. She's glad you are Lionpaw and becoming such good friends."

"Is she happy with Tigertail?" Dawnpaw blurted out. "Are they together in StarClan, too?"

Honeywing purred. "Yes they are, they haven't left each other's side since Tigertail got here."

Dawnpaw imagined in her mind Sunstream and Tigertail together in StarClan again, it made her feel a little better. Dawnpaw looked at Honeywing, still confused about one thing. "So why *are* you visiting me? We're not kin, I know I was Sunstream's apprentice but still..."

"That's a good question." Honeywing said, stepping closer to Dawnpaw. "And I've been watching you since you were born Dawnpaw." She replied, Dawnpaw looked around uncomfortable.

"You have?" She questioned.

Honeywing nodded. "I know that sounds a little odd, but you have a bright destiny ahead of you." Dawnpaw tilted her head, still not understand. "Don't let it confuse you too much." Honeywing purred with amusement. "You're still young and you have nothing to worry about."

"But," Dawnpaw mewed, her mind racing with questions. "Is there something I need to do? You told me I have some kind of destiny, but what do I have to do to fulfill that?"

Honeywing's eyes were soft, the StarClan she-cat stepped forward and touched her muzzle to Dawnpaw's forehead, she felt a gradual feeling of warmth and safety spread through her body. "No destiny is laid out in a perfect stone path." She said, her voice barely above a whisper. "You have a destiny yes, but what they destiny is will be decided by your own choices." Honeywing stepped back and Dawnpaw looked up at her, her words resonated in Dawnpaw's mind.

"I have to go now, Dawnpaw." Honeywing mewed. "But do not fret, you will see me again." Honeywing touched her muzzle to Dawnpaw's forehead once again before turning around. Dawnpaw didn't know what else to do other than watch the golden she-cat vanish into the Spirit Woods.

Dawnpaw lifted her and opened her eyes, blinking sleep away. She was mildly alarmed to find Flowerstar to look down at her. She jumped and scrambled to her paws. "Sorry," Dawnpaw apologized her pelt burning. "I didn't mean to fall asleep."

Flowerstar chuckled. "It's quite alright, Dawnpaw." She mewed. "It happens to most apprentices who visit here. The Moonstone tends to do that to cats." Dawnpaw looked past Flowerstar at the Moonstone, it's light was slowly fading. "Come now," She spoke. "It's time we leave."

Dawnpaw nodded and began following her leader back into the tunnel. Images of her dream flashed in mind, was she really visited by a StarClan cat? She still didn't know why she was, or what this destiny meant to her. She tried to shove the thoughts away and just make it to the surface.

When they stepped outside, the sun was slowly starting to rise. Did they really sleep all night? "Where are the others?" Dawnpaw asked, not finding a trace of Lionpaw, Goldenpaw, Turtlepaw or Thornpelt.

"This way." Flowerstar turned away from the Spirit Tree and walked a few taillengths away to a smaller tree den, this one much more to scale with the SunTree. Sitting outside was Thornpelt, who looked up when the two she-cats approached.

"Are you all done?" He questioned.

"We are." Flowerstar replied. "We should head home now." Thornpelt nodded and stepped into the tree den, seeming to wake up the other three apprentices. They all came out look tired, but Turtlepaw went to Dawnpaw's side when he saw her.

"What was it like?" He questioned, she noticed that Goldenpaw and Lionpaw were also looking towards her.

"Incredible." Dawnpaw replied, it was the only word she could find to describe her experience and she didn't know if she should tell them about Honeywing or even if she was allowed to.

"Let's not waste any time here." Thornpelt mewed. "The rain is going to get worse if we stay here too long."

"I agree, we don't want to be caught in a storm." Flowerstar looked up at the sky which was slowly becoming clogged with dark clouds. "Let's go." The group of cats began their journey home, and Dawnpaw had a whole new outlook on the future.

It didn't take them long to reach the MoonClan border, and when they crossed the small stream, Flowerstar stopped them. "We should wait for the next patrol so they can show us where to cross."

Soon enough, a MoonClan patrol came into view. At the head of it

was Lightningwing, followed by Ebonywing, Icepaw, Dovewing and Smallstrike. "Flowerstar." Lightningwing dipped her head, Dawnpaw hadn't really seen the she-cat up close before. Her coat was pure white and her eyes a pale yellow, Dawnpaw could see the reasoning behind her name. "Shadowpelt told us you'd be around here."

Flowerstar nodded. "Did Crowstar think of another way for us to cross?" She questioned.

"He did." Lightningwing replied. "It's not ideal, and there's a bit more walking but it's the easiest way unless you want to swim."

"As long as it gets us home." Flowerstar mewed and the MoonClan patrol began leading them along the bank. Dawnpaw looked over into SunClan territory, longing to be back in her own territory but she had to wait.

They walked a long ways along the river and Dawnpaw noticed that it was slowly getting thinner. Lightningwing stopped and looked across the river. "This is probably the thinnest part of the river, you should all be able to jump across with ease."

Flowerstar was the first to test it out, she gave a strong jump and landed safely on the other side. She looked back over at her cats. "Now the apprentices."

One by one, the apprentices started jumping over the river. Dawnpaw felt fear clawing at her, but she swallowed it and jumped. Her paws landed safely and gracefully on the other side, and it felt good to have SunClan territory underneath her paws once more. She breathed in the familiar scent of her home and let out a purr.

"Thank you." Flowerstar called to the MoonClan cats. "Give Crowstar our thanks and best wishes."

"We will! Save travels, SunClan!" Lightningwing called in return before they vanished back into their territory.

"Come on," Flowerstar turned, heading back into SunClan's thick forest. "Let's go home."

Chapter 10

Dawnpaw sat by the apprentice den, trying to shield herself from the slow fall of rain, she was really starting to hate the feeling of wet fur. Thornpelt had instructed her to wait in camp because she had something to do. She wasn't sure what it was, but she couldn't imagine it being fun knowing her mentor. Dawnpaw could tell that she wasn't the only one of the her Clanmates that hated the rain, most SunClan cats were in their dens or taking some kind of shelter if they weren't out in the forest.

Dawnpaw spotted Yarrowpaw entering camp from it's back entrance, his jaws full of wet moss. His long, gray fur was clogged with water, his green eyes betrayed that he certainly wasn't happy about being soaked. The soggy apprentice made his way to the medicine cat den where he disappeared inside.

In the moon since Dawnpaw and the others travelled to the Moonstone, Yarrowpaw had been cleared for light duties but he store wore the reminders of the attack with scars on his shoulder and chest. They were fully healed, but most of the apprentices bore scars from that day.

Movement caught Dawnpaw's attention and she looked towards the center of camp where she saw Fawnpaw exiting the SunTree with Flowerstar at her side. The brow she-cat look up at her leader with unsteady eyes, she was nervous. Flowerstar's gaze was steady, but didn't appear to be angry. Were they talking about her earning her warrior name finally? Dawnpaw had noticed slight improvement in Fawnpaw's attitude, she had worked hard and been nicer to be around, even if Dawnpaw still didn't spend much time with her.

Flowerstar said something to Fawnpaw which caused her green eyes to light up brighter than the sun. She dipped her head and appeared to be thanking Flowerstar, she turned and bounded off towards the warrior den where Icepetal and Snowtail were sitting outside. Flowerstar watched the she-cat run off with amusement in her eyes, then turned away into her den.

Dawnpaw could only assume that Flowerstar said that Fawnpaw could have her warrior ceremony, otherwise she wouldn't be as excited. Dawnpaw heard rustling and turned her head to the camp's entrance where a patrol was pushing their way into camp. Snakewhisker led the patrol with Crowfur, Applespots, Redclaw and Thornpelt behind him. Dawnpaw twitched her ears, why didn't Thornpelt take her on patrol with him?

She bit back her resentment as her mentor approached her. Before speaking, Thornpelt glanced at Fawnpaw and Icepetal, then back to Dawnpaw. "Come with me, we're going into the forest."

Dawnpaw jumped to her paws, she loved hunting and she assumed that's what they were doing. "Are we going hunting?" She questioning, longing for the rush of catching prey.

"You'll see when we get there." Thornpelt said without patience, he turned and headed back towards the camp entrance. Dawnpaw wasn't sure what they were doing, but she followed without argument. At least she would be doing something other than sitting idly in the rain doing nothing.

Dawnpaw had noticed that since she became Thornpelt's apprentice, she didn't like doing nothing. She liked being active, hunting or training and keeping her paws busy, especially in the chilly rain. Dawnpaw followed her mentor quickly as he moved through the wet forest, when she had first became his apprentice she could barely keep up with him, but now she was right on his heels.

Dawnpaw realized they were heading towards the training area, but she could scent other cats. She quickly picked out Turtlepaw and Lionpaw, as well as Goldenpaw and Cinderpaw. Dawnpaw and Thornpelt stepped into the training area and saw the apprentices as well as their mentors.

Lionpaw met Dawnpaw's gaze with excitement burning in his eyes. Behind Dawnpaw, she heard the leaves rustling and Fawnpaw and Icepetal stepped into the training area.

"Today," Rustpelt began speaking. "Is the warrior assessments for

Lionpaw, Goldenpaw and Fawnpaw." Dawnpaw looked at Lionpaw in surprise. Lionpaw a warrior? Dawnpaw noticed that he truly looked like a warrior. His muscles were visible underneath his pelt, and he stood tall and proud. Goldenpaw too looked like a warrior, slender and beautiful.

"They will have two parts to their assessment, partner hunting and solo hunting." Sandfoot mewed. "The three other apprentices will be paired with the three soon-to-be warriors. Cinderpaw doesn't have as much training as Dawnpaw and Turtlepaw, but she's a more than capable hunter."

Cinderpaw held her head high, Dawnpaw looked at Thornpelt as he stepped forward. "Keep in mind this will also be an assessment for Dawnpaw, Turtlepaw and Cinderpaw. It may not be your warrior assessment but I expect you all to act like it is." His tone was stern, both Turtlepaw and Cinderpaw's eyes flashed with determination. Dawnpaw felt that same determination crawling under her pelt. She would truly impress her mentor.

"The partners will be Fawnpaw and Turtlepaw, Goldenpaw and Cinderpaw and Lionpaw and Dawnpaw." Icepetal announced, Dawnpaw looked at Lionpaw with excitement. She loved hunting with Lionpaw, and she knew she could help him pass this assessment. "Fawnpaw, you and Turtlepaw go towards the MoonClan border, Goldenpaw and Cinderpaw towards the AshClan border and Lionpaw and Dawnpaw will take the gathering hollow border." The six apprentices joined into their groups, and Lionpaw looked at Dawnpaw with excitement and confidence in his amber eyes.

"Remember," Rainears added as a final note. "We will be watching you, do your best." With that, the three groups broke off in their respective directions.

"I'm so glad I got paired with you." Lionpaw said with a slight skip in his step. "I know I'll pass for sure."

Dawnpaw's pelt grew hot, but she nodded. "I'll make sure you pass this assessment." When the two reached their hunting area, Dawnpaw instantly began tracking prey. She ignored the scent of

wet leaves and mud, trying to pick out prey scent. Closing her eyes, the scent of mouse bathed her tongue. She followed the scent trail, Lionpaw sticking close to ther.

She motioned with her muzzle as she spotted the mouse, Lionpaw nodded and dropped into a crouch. Dawnpaw slipped away, wanting to be able to catch it just in case in escaped from Lionpaw's claws.

Dawnpaw had never seen Lionpaw hunt up close before, his amber eyes were focused intently on the mouse and his pawsteps were silent. She noticed his claws, which were abnormally large for his paws. She knew this was a feature in his family, Hawktalon and Thornpelt shared the same feature, she was suddenly thankful that she was in the same Clan as him, she wouldn't to face those claws.

Lionpaw moved like lightning, instantly pouncing on and killing the mouse. He picked it up and look towards Dawnpaw. She let out a purr and padded over to him. "Great catch." She praised.

"Great find." He responded with a light tone. "But we need to keep going, I want to catch as much prey as possible." Dawnpaw agreed with him and they continued through the forest. Each of them kept their eyes and noses peeled for prey, but this time it was Lionpaw who spotted their next catch. It was a large squirrel, perched on an uplifted root and trying to hide a stash of food.

Dawnpaw felt a stab of disappointment. "It's too close to the tree." She whispered. "If we get too close it will just run up." Lionpaw was silent for a moment, his expression pondering. He looked at the tree and around Dawnpaw.

"Follow me." Moving quietly, Lionpaw led Dawnpaw to a large sage bush. "Crouch and wait here." He instructed. Dawnpaw wasn't sure what he was up to, but she listened and crouched near the sage bush, trying her best to hide.

Lionpaw walked away, avoiding the squirrel who was still at the base of the tree, he crept around slowly until Dawnpaw couldn't see him anymore. Dawnpaw narrowed her eyes, trying to spot his golden pelt, but all she could see was undergrowth. She waited

patiently, hoping that Lionpaw knew what he was doing.

Suddenly there was a loud cry and Lionpaw exploded out of the undergrowth towards the squirrel, Dawnpaw jumped at the sudden display but she noticed that the squirrel was now dashing away from it's tree. She barely had a second to react, but with claws out she cut the squirrel's escape route off and it ran straight into her claws.

She killed it cleanly and looked up at Lionpaw, she was very impressed with him. "That was a good plan." Dawnpaw replied.

"Thanks." Lionpaw puffed out his chest. "Good reaction, by the way." He brushed past her, his pelt gently brushing hers. She felt sparks where his pelt touched, but she followed him after burying the squirrel.

They continued their hunt, stopping to catch any piece of prey they came across with ease. Dawnpaw enjoyed hunting with Lionpaw, she enjoyed running with him and the success of catching prey.

Dawnpaw felt they might have gotten slightly carried away when it came to hunting, they were gone for quite a while but managed to catch five pieces of prey in total. They each carried some pieces back as they returned to the training hollow. When they reached it, the other apprentices were already back, and looking mildly annoyed.

"What took you so long?" Thornpelt demanded, narrowing his eyes at Dawnpaw. Why was he looking at her like that.

"We wanted to catch as much prey as possible." Lionpaw responded, setting his prey down. Dawnpaw looked at the other two groups, seeing how much prey each of them caught. Fawnpaw and Turtlepaw caught four pieces, and both looked happy with their success. Goldenpaw and Cinderpaw only caught three pieces, but both she-cats looked content with themselves.

"It's a good hunt." Rustpelt nodded, his amber eyes glowing with pride for his apprentice. "The other apprentices can head back to camp, it's time for their solo assessment." His dismissed and

Dawnpaw stood up along with Turtlepaw and Cinderpaw.

"We'll be staying and watching them as well." Rainears mewed. "We'll meet the rest of you back at camp when the assessment is over."

Dawnpaw looked at Lionpaw one last time before turning into the forest. "Good luck." She purred.

"Won't need it." Lionpaw puffed out his chest, his eyes sparkling. Dawnpaw heard a scoff from her brother, but she ignored it.She turned away and walked side by side with Turtlepaw and Cinderpaw.

"How was hunting with Fawnpaw." Dawnpaw asked, wondering how he fared with the bossy, temperamental she-cat.

"It went really well." Turtlepaw replied, taking Dawnpaw by surprise. "Fawnpaw is a really good hunter and we worked well together." Dawnpaw flicked her tail, somehow she couldn't see Fawnpaw getting along with anyone.

"How was hunting with Lionpaw?" Cinderpaw asked. "You two brought back the most prey."

"It was great." Dawnpaw purred. "I had so much fun hunting with him, he's a great hunter." Turtlepaw snorted. Dawnpaw looked at her brother and noticed he was avoiding her gaze. "Something wrong?"

Turtlepaw looked back at her, his green eyes sparking with annoyance. "He's an arrogant furball, he's so full of himself. You'd think he was StarClan's gift to the forest the way he talks about himself."

Dawnpaw flicked her ears. "He's confident, yes, but he's not *that* bad. You can't deny he's a talented cat. He's a great fighter and a great hunter."

"He's arrogant. He's cocky and he's reckless." Turtlepaw growled, turning away from Dawnpaw once more and focusing on the path ahead of them.

"He's not reckless." Dawnpaw countered. "You saw how he fought against the AshClan warriors when they attacked us."

Turtlepaw whirled on Dawnpaw, she jumped back in surprise. "He's the reason they even attacked us! If he wouldn't have challenged Echoheart we could've gotten away."

"That's not even close to the truth." Dawnpaw said in Lionpaw's defense. "Echoheart was there to start a fight, Lionpaw was defending Yarrowpaw. They would've attacked us either way."

Turtlepaw didn't respond, he just let out a groan and picked up his pace, disappearing into the forest. When he was gone, Dawnpaw dropped her head. She felt guilt clawing at her instantly, she hated fighting with Turtlepaw. They should never fight, Dawnpaw hated it. With a sigh she looked at Cinderpaw. "We should get back to camp."

"Sorry you two are fighting." Cinderpaw said kindly. "I personally don't think that Lionpaw is that bad. I just think that Turtlepaw doesn't want you getting close to him."

Dawnpaw looked at the young she-cat in surprise. Turtlepaw doesn't want her getting close to Lionpaw? Where did that thought even cross Cinderpaw's mind? "I don't know." Was all Dawnpaw said in response, unable to think of anything else to say and continued towards camp.

Dawnpaw returned to her spot by the apprentice den when she reached camp, eagerly awaiting the return of Lionpaw, Goldenpaw and Fawnpaw. She wanted to see if they passed their assessments. She couldn't help but think of Thornpelt's glare at her, she wondered if she did something wrong and managed to put Lionpaw's assessment at stake, she tried to calm herself but part of her couldn't fight the anxiety.

Not to mention, Turtlepaw wouldn't talk to her after their argument on the way back. She just wanted to stop feeling guilty for once in her life. Dawnpaw nearly jumped out of her pelt when she heard the camp entrance rustle. She turned to see Lionpaw step into camp with confidence glowing off of him, his amber eyes were confident

and excited. Dawnpaw could tell just from the way he carried himself that he passed.

She jumped to her paws and quickly ran over to his side. "Did you pass?" She questioned, though she already knew the answer.

"Of course." Lionpaw puffed out his chest. "Our mentors are going to talk to Flowerstar now."

Dawnpaw let out a purr. "That's wonderful, I'm happy for you." Lionpaw's gaze softened as he met her gaze. She felt her pelt growing warmer, and she didn't want to look away.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting." Flowerstar's call pulled Dawnpaw's attention away from Lionpaw and towards the center of camp.

"That's my call." He purred and bounded to his sister's and Fawnpaw's side. Together, they walked over to their mentors while the rest of SunClan started gathering around. Dawnpaw spotted Turtlepaw sitting beside Rainears, and he didn't even glance in Dawnpaw's direction. With her head ducked, Dawnpaw decided to sit beside Cinderpaw and Yarrowpaw.

"I've gathered the Clan today because it's time for three cats to earn their warrior names. They have proven themselves in their assessment and I believe it's time for them to be rewarded." Flowerstar began speaking, her voice bold. Quickly forgetting about her and Turtlepaw's argument, Dawnpaw looked at Lionpaw who sat proudly in the center of the group with Goldenpaw and Fawnpaw. Flowerstar jumped down from the SunTree and faced the apprentices.

"I, Flowerstar, leader of SunClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained long and hard to understand the ways of your noble code and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn." The familiar words rang in Dawnpaw's mind, when would it be her turn? Flowerstar looked at Fawnpaw first. "Fawnpaw, you have had your warrior ceremony postponed. However, I believe in the few short moons since then you have shown great improvement." Dawnpaw noticed Willownose

and Bramblepelt looking at their daughter with pride, and Fawnpaw held her head high. "Fawnpaw, Lionpaw and Goldenpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do." Fawnpaw replied first, her voice eager and proud.

"I do." Goldenpaw's voice was calm and steady.

"I do." Dawnpaw couldn't deny the confidence and pride in Lionpaw's mew.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names. Fawnpaw, this day you will known as Fawnheart. SunClan honors your determination and spirit." Fawnheart stepped forward, licking Flowerstar's shoulder as the leader touched her muzzle to the new warrior's head. "Goldenpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Goldenleaf. SunClan honors your kindness and patience." Goldenleaf repeated the steps that Fawnheart did and Flowerstar moved on to Lionpaw. Dawnpaw felt anticipation claw at her pelt. "Lionpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Lionclaw. SunClan honors your bravery and spirit in battle. I know that Tigertail and Sunstream are so proud of both of you, as I am." Flowerstar raised her voice. "We welcome as full warriors of SunClan!"

"Fawnheart! Goldenleaf! Lionclaw!" The Clan cheered their new warriors, and Dawnpaw cheered as loud as she could for her friends. The cats started to separate, Bramblepelt and Willownose went to congratulate Fawnheart and Flamekit, Heatherkit and Brackenkit all ran up to congratulate their sister. For once, Dawnpaw could see a tenderness in her eyes.

Dawnpaw's eyes went to Lionclaw and Goldenleaf who were standing close together. "You know they're proud of us, right?" Lionclaw asked quietly.

"I do." Goldenleaf purred, nuzzling her brother. "And I'm proud of you too."

Dawnpaw felt a surge of emotions watching them, she looked for

Turtlepaw who also watched the display. Dawnpaw stepped towards her brother the same time he did.

"I'm sorry for yelling at you earlier." Turtlepaw apologized, his tail dropping.

"I'm sorry too." Dawnpaw said. "I hate fighting with you." She nuzzled his cheek. "Let's not do it anymore."

"Sounds good to me." Turtlepaw purred. Dawnpaw noticed that Blazeheart and Windflight were closer to them, their eyes soft.

"I heard you both did very well today." Windflight said, her green eyes soft as heather. "I'm so proud of both of you, you'll make fantastic warriors when your time comes."

Dawnpaw looked at her parents, then at her brother, and finally towards Lionclaw who was preparing for his vigil. She felt a surge of warmth and realized, she was the luckiest cat in the forest.

Chapter 11

The forest was dark, illuminated only by moonlight. However, when Dawnpaw looked up she couldn't see any sign of the moon or stars. Her pelt prickled with uneasy, something wasn't right. Dawnpaw tried to take in her surroundings, she was in SunClan's territory but she couldn't scent anything, she couldn't scent SunClan's scent or the scent of any cats nearby. Dawnpaw looked around, flattening her ears. She felt so alone and vulnerable.

Dawnpaw's ears twitched as she heard a cry, and it sounded familiar. Dawnpaw looked around in alarm, looking for the source of the distressed sound. It pulled her towards the river, and she broke into a sprint trying to reach the cat that was in trouble. When Dawnpaw reached the river it was much different than she remembered.

The waters weren't still or gentle, they were crashing and rushing dangerously. The water was as black as the empty sky above it. Dawnpaw's eyes scanned the rushing waters, looking for cat that was in trouble. She couldn't see anything, was she too late?

That's when Dawnpaw saw the bundle of wet fur being torn down the river, their fur was brown and the cat was tiny. Dawnpaw ran towards the river and met the cat's painfully familiar green eyes. *Willowkit.*

It was Dawnpaw's sister, and she was drowning! "Willowkit!" Dawnpaw cried. "Don't worry! I'm coming!" Dawnpaw raced along the bank, knowing she couldn't swim in the water but she could find something to pull Willowkit! *I'll save you, Willowkit! I promise!* Dawnpaw ran along the river, looking for a branch or long stick that she could pull Willowkit out with.

As Dawnpaw ran she heard another cry and skidded to a stop, she turned to see the struggling body of Sunstream. Dawnpaw's heart twisted as she watched her mentor be forced under the surface time and time again. Behind Sunstream, there was another cat, Dawnpaw

instantly recognized the amber eyes and pale tabby stripes of Tigertail.

Dawnpaw froze in her paw steps. *What's happening?* Could she save all of them? Or would she die trying? Dawnpaw ran ahead of the three drowning cats, finding a sturdy looking branch. *I'll save you, I'll save you all!* She vowed, dragging the stuck to the river and sticking it out.

Dawnpaw could feel the water lapping at her paws, threatening to pull her under but she stood firm. Dawnpaw dared to take another step forward, but her paw stepped into thick mud. Dawnpaw lifted her paw in alarm, causing her other paws to slip in the mud. With a cry of alarm, Dawnpaw dropped her stick in the water and slipped into the churning water. It was ice cold, tugging at her fur and pulling her under.

Dawnpaw's head dipped below the surface, she couldn't breathe. She forced herself to breach the surface once more, but it wasn't long before she was back under. In the distance, thunder rolled through the sky and lightning split the air. "Help!" Dawnpaw tried to call, but her voice was cut off by a wave that overtook her head.

"Dawnpaw!" There was a soft voice calling her name, and on the river bank she spotted the StarClan cat, Honeywing. The medicine cat had a large stick, similar to the one Dawnpaw found. "Come over here!" Dawnpaw churred her paws as hard as she could, but exhaustion was starting to grip her body. She reached Honeywing, biting onto the stick and looking up at the she-cat, but when she met the gaze of the cat...it wasn't green eyes.

She instead faced the dark, bold amber eyes of Thornpelt. Malice filled the amber depths with hatred cracking like the lightning in the sky around them. Before Dawnpaw could pull herself up, Thornpelt released the branch and Dawnpaw fell back into the river. Fear and panic gripped her heart, she didn't break eye contact with Thornpelt, falling slowly into the river as thunder cracked through the air.

Dawnpaw shot up in her nest, heart racing and body aching. She looked around in alarm, expecting to see herself surrounded by

churning waters. Instead she only saw her denmates, sleeping peacefully. Turtlepaw stirred when she jumped up, but did not wake. *It was a dream.* Dawnpaw realized, trying to calm her erratic breathing.

Images of her nightmare were fresh in her mind, the terrified faces of Sunstream, Willowkit and Tigertail, and the hate-filled expression of her own mentor. That one in particular was clawing at the back of her mind. Dawnpaw looked at her denmates once before climbing out of the den. She expected to feel the cold drizzle of rain that she had been feeling for the past moon, but instead she was greeted by an eerie calm.

The sky was gray, filled with thick clouds and the sun was hidden behind them. Dawnpaw got an uneasy feeling from such clouds, she twitched her whiskers and looked back down.

"Good morning." Dawnpaw jumped slightly as Flowerstar spoke to her, stepping outside of the SunTree. Dawnpaw dipped her head respectfully towards her leader.

"Good morning." She replied.

"Everything alright, Dawnpaw?" She questioned, with genuine concern in her green eyes. "You look nervous."

Dawnpaw looked away. "I'm alright." She replied, her voice sullen. "Just had a bad dream last night."

"This kind of weather normally brings nightmares." Flowerstar mewed. "It'so unsettling isn't it?" Dawnpaw looked back at Flowerstar, the gray she-cat was looking up at the sky with troubled eyes. "The calm before the storm."

"A storm?" Dawnpaw echoed.

Flowerstar nodded. "There's thick clouds in the sky, and thunder growling in the distance. Looks likes it's going to be a bad one as well, I just hope it doesn't begin until after the gathering tonight."

Dawnpaw realized that tonight was in fact the gathering, the first gathering since LIonclaw's warrior ceremony. He, Goldenleaf and

Fawnheart would be welcomed as warriors. Dawnpaw knew he would be excited, and she didn't want it ruined by the rain. Dawnpaw couldn't find any trace of Thornpelt, and part of her was incredibly grateful. She still couldn't shake the look in his eyes from her memory.

Dawnpaw decided to make herself useful and take some prey to Poppyfur and Pebblepaw, she wondered if they were awake yet. She reached the den with a squirrel for the two of them and peeked inside, Poppyfur was speaking with Dovetail and Pebblepaw looked incredibly excited.

"Listen to me, Dovetail." Poppyfur mewed, her voice and eyes stern. "I want you to instantly get off warrior duties, and rest in the nursery as much as possible." *Nursery?* Was Dovetail expecting more kits? "You remember what happened with your last two litters, we don't want that. We want both you and your kits to be healthy, I'll bring you strength herbs everyday until they're born." *Last two litters?* Dawnpaw only knew of Yarrowpaw and his littermates, did Dovetail have another litter.

"Thank you, Poppyfur." Dovetail dipped her head. "I know Willownose will welcome me back into the nursery." With a purr at her daughter, Dovetail turned and left the medicine cat den. Poppyfur turned her green gaze to Dawnpaw.

"Is that for us?" Poppyfur questioned, eyeing the squirrel in Dawnpaw's jaws. She set the squirrel down and nodded.

"Pebblepaw." Poppyfur called to her apprentice. "Why don't you make sure that your mother is settled into the nursery and make sure she has everything she needs. You can eat when you get back."

"Okay!" Pebblepaw agreed cheerfully and bounded out of the medicine cat den and towards the nursery.

"I'm assuming you're wondering why I told Dovetail to be so careful?" She questioned, sweeping up some herb scraps with her tail.

Dawnpaw nodded. "She had two litters?" She asked, looking out at

the nursery where Pebblepaw slipped inside to talk with her mother.

Poppyfur nodded sadly. "She had two kits in her first litter, Breezekit and Owlkit. Neither of them survived the night however." Dawnpaw's ears dropped, she had no idea that Dovetail lost two kits prior to Cinderpaw, Yarrowpaw and Pebblepaw. "For some reason, Dovetail's body doesn't react to pregnancy well. When she's expecting kits she doesn't get big enough, she gets sick and she's in constant pain. I'm honestly surprised that Pebblepaw and her littermates came out as strong as they did, but even Yarrowpaw is smaller than he should be." Poppyfur sighed. "Why she would want to go through this again, it's a mystery to me."

Dawnpaw looked at her paws. "I hope she doesn't lose her kits." She mewed quietly, SunClan didn't need more death.

Poppyfur sighed. "That's what I'm here for, I'll do everything I can to keep those kits alive." She stood up and looked at the squirrel, Dawnpaw could hear Pebblepaw returning. "Thank you for the prey, Dawnpaw. You should prepare for the gathering."

SunClan arrived last to the gathering, but Dawnpaw could tell that LichenClan had also just arrived. The dark night sky was still filled with clouds that threatened to bring a massive storm, but it had yet to start raining. The moon, however, was shining brightly even through the clouds.

"Welcome." Crowstar greeted Flowerstar and Jaggedstar as they took their places on their trees. Dawnpaw noticed that Hawkface was no longer with the other deputies, instead Shadowpelt was in his place. *Did Hawkface die?*

"Let's begin as soon as possible." Lionstar spoke. "We don't want to be caught in this storm."

"I agree." Flowerstar mewed. "I'll start us of," Dawnpaw could feel Lionclaw sit up proudly beside her, he mumbled something to his sister on the other side of him. Dawnpaw couldn't help but feel happy for the new warrior, she knew he had been dreaming of this for a long time.

"First off, SunClan brings three new warriors to this gathering. Please welcome Lionclaw, Goldenleaf and Fawnheart!" All four Clans cheered, and Dawnpaw could feel the confidence radiating off Lionclaw's pelt, she held back a purr of amusement. "We also learned that Dovetail is expecting kits."

"I was also told that kits near leaf-bare are always a good omen." Jaggedstar spoke, his voice soft.

"Thank you, Jaggedstar." Flowerstar purred. "I certainly hope this will be a good omen." She stepped back and sat down on her branch. "Why don't you take over next."

Jaggedstar dipped his head and stood up. "LichenClan also brings new warriors, please welcome Heatherwind and Mudpelt!"

Once again, the Clans cheered. Dawnpaw searched for the new warriors and saw both of them sitting with their heads high. There was a black and white tom sitting near them that Dawnpaw could only assume was their father.

"You know," Dawnpaw nearly jumped when Lionclaw spoke in her ear. "I hear that their father, Seedclaw was a kittypet."

"Really?" Dawnpaw turned to look at Lionclaw for a moment, then back at Seedclaw. He was muscular and strong, he didn't look like a kittypet. Dawnpaw personally hadn't seen a kittypet before, but she knew they were fat and soft.

"Hey!" Dawnpaw heard a harsh hiss behind her, she turned to see Crowfur and Rainears giving both of them nasty glares. "Now is not the time to gossip about LichenClan." Crowfur histólise.

"Sorry." Dawnpaw apologized, her pelt burning and she turned back to Jaggedstar just in time for him to announce two new apprentices, Timberpaw and Rootpaw. Dawnpaw remembered when those two were announced as being born, that was one of her first gatherings.

"Lionstar, will you go next?" Jaggedstar asked, taking his seat as Lionstar stood up.

"AshClan proudly welcomes two new apprentices, Hawkpaw and

Harepaw!" The Clans cheered. As Lionstar finished his announcements, Dawnpaw felt cold droplets of rain splashed on her nose. She looked up and saw that rain was slowly starting to fall from the sky, the leaders noticed it as well.

"I'll make my announcements quickly so we can get back to our camps." Crowstar said, standing up. "MoonClan unfortunately suffered the loss of our deputy Hawkface earlier this moon. He passed peacefully to old age, and I am proud to welcome Shadowpelt as the new deputy of MoonClan." There was a moment of sullen silence for the fallen deputy, but welcoming cheers for Shadowpelt. Dawnpaw liked Shadowpelt, he always seemed like a kind cat. "MoonClan also welcomes Brokenpaw and Tallpaw as apprentices, and Bonefur and Swiftheart as warriors!"

The Clans cheered once more, Dawnpaw looked for Swiftheart and Bonefur. Both toms had their heads held high, Dawnpaw wondered if Lionclaw would try and congratulate Swiftheart, she recalled them being friends before.

"With that," Crowstar mewed. "I call this gathering to a close, let's get home before this storm starts." The rain was already starting to fall harder, Dawnpaw hoped they weren't caught in a bad storm. She stood up, looking for Silverpaw but quickly realizing she wouldn't have time to talk to the AshClan apprentice, she was mildly upset but Dawnpaw knew she would see her at the next gathering.

Flowerstar jumped down from her tree and quickly gathered her Clan, Dawnpaw bounded alongside Lionclaw and Turtlepaw as they hurried to get home. It wasn't long before the rain began falling harder and faster. Thunder growled in the distance, bring Dawnpaw uneasy reminders of her earlier dream.

"We need to hurry," Flowerstar called to her Clan. "We have to be careful crossing the river, the stones will be slick." SunClan made it to the river, and took their time crossed without any incident. However, the rain was pouring now and soaking the cats to the bone. The cats of SunClan nearly broke into a run as they tried their best to hurry home.

Finally, SunClan's camp came into view. Dawnpaw was exhausted from the run and ready to get into her dry den. The cats of SunClan quickly began hurrying to their dens, but Dawnpaw noticed Flowerstar staying out of hers for a moment, watching the cats of her Clan. Dawnpaw turned away and padded quickly to the apprentice den, Yarrowpaw was the first one there.

He moved to step inside but Dawnpaw noticed a look of alarm on his face and he had to force himself to back out of the den. "What's wrong?" Cinderpaw questioned, rushing to her brother's side.

"The apprentice den is flooded!" He cried, immediately catching the attention of Flowerstar who moved over to the den.

"What's going on?" She asked, looking towards the den.

"The apprentice den is completely flooded." Yarrowpaw responded. "We can't sleep in there."

Flowerstar looked around, troubled. She looked at the soaking apprentices for a moment, then a flash of an idea sparked in her eyes. "I have an idea, follow me." The four apprentices shared a glance, but followed towards the back of the camp.

"What's going on?" Dawnpaw heard the mew of Poppyfur who was peering out from her den with narrowed eyes.

"The apprentice den is flooded." Flowerstar replied. "I'm taking them to the den outside of camp for now, do you happen to have any extra moss for nests?"

"I should have enough." Poppyfur answered with a quick glance into her den. "I'll meet you at the den."

"There's a den outside of camp?" Dawnpaw questioned as the group slipped out of camp.

Flowerstar nodded. "Normally, it's where the sick cats go if there's an outbreak of greencough, but it can serve as the apprentice den for now. It's not far." Flowerstar was right, it wasn't far. Before they even reached the Moss Hollow, they turned up a small inclined path and through a clump of trees was a large, stone den. Dawnpaw was

surprised at how large it was.

They stepped inside, it smelled of damp stone and old moss. She looked around, there was a small crack in the ceiling, but minimal amounts of water dripped inside. Dawnpaw looked at the other apprentices, none of them seemed to know what to think of it. Poppyfur showed up a few moments later with Pebblepaw at her side and a large bundle of moss. "It was hard to keep it from getting wet but it would get wet anyway with how drenched you all art." The medicine cat mewed setting down the moss.

Both medicine cats and the leader stayed to help form nests out of the moss, Dawnpaw made sure her's was close to Turtlepaw's. "Get some sleep, all of you." Flowerstar mewed softly. "I know it may be hard, sleeping in a new den but at least you'll be dry. With that, Flowerstar, Pebblepaw and Poppyfur all returned to camp.

Dawnpaw felt unsure about the den, she felt isolated from the rest of her Clanmates. It was large and empty compared to the real apprentice den, which was warm and cozy surrounded by her denmates. At least Dawnpaw had her brother to be close with, and Cinderpaw and Yarrowpaw had eachother. Dawnpaw did noticed that all four nests were fairly close to each other, she was glad she wasn't the only one who felt the same way she did.

Dawnpaw curled up into her nest, pressing close to Turtlepaw who did the same. She closed her eyes, but sleep didn't come. Her nightmare was still bothering her, and she couldn't shake the terrifying image of Thornpelt as he dropped her back into that river. Why was she so scared of her mentor? He was a tough mentor, but he wouldn't harm her, would he?

Dawnpaw's mind drifted to then Moonstone journey, the branch gave out when *she* crossed the branch, she was lightest cat out of all the cats that went on that journey. She remembered when it slipped out from under her paws, it didn't feel like it broke it slipped. It almost felt like it was pushed.

Her mind then floated back to when the AshClan patrol attacked the apprentices. It was *Thornpelt* who sent all the apprentices to one of the most dangerous parts of the territory. It was Thornpelt who

came in to save them as well, how did he know that they were in trouble? Images of Echoheart flashed in her mind, but it was never *just* Echoheart. Every time Dawnpaw saw Echoheart, Thornpelt was always right there.

Dawnpaw sat up her nest, her thoughts bringing a panic to her chest. She looked at her denmates, all three of them were asleep. Perhaps her thoughts had lasted longer than she thought and she had no idea why she was having them. Surely everything that happened was a coincidence?

Dawnpaw let out a weary sigh before resting her head once more. She closed her eyes and finally allowed sleep to take her.

Chapter 12

Dawnpaw made her way to camp, her paws sinking into the muddy ground. Each step kicked up flecks of water and mud onto her white belly fur. Dawnpaw's ears twitched with annoyance the closer she got, she hated the rain and she wanted it to stop. The early morning air was bitter and cold, stinging her ear tips. The rain had not subsided in the moon since the apprentice den was flooded.

The water inside turned to mud and hardened, leaving Dawnpaw with the impression that they would not be returning to the apprentice den anytime soon. The outside den still felt too big and empty, but she and the other apprentices were slowly growing accustomed to it. Dawnpaw knew that Willownose's kits would be joining the apprentice den soon, they were nearly six moons old and she hoped that it would help with the empty feeling of the large den.

Dawnpaw reached camp, life was just barely getting started for SunClan but the first cat she spotted was Thornpelt. He stood outside the warrior's den speaking with Applespots, Sandfoot and Bramblepelt. When Dawnpaw saw her mentor, she grew slightly tense with images flashing in her mind of her recent nightmares of the tabby warrior.

As if he sensed her arrival, Thornpelt turned his head to look at Dawnpaw. Fur rose along her spine, but she forced herself to calm down. Dawnpaw had no idea why she felt this way about her mentor. *I kind of do.* Dawnpaw's told herself silently but shook away the thoughts, she wanted to trust her mentor, she had to trust him. Thornpelt bid farewell to the three cats he was talking to and turned to Dawnpaw.

She headed towards him and met him in the center of camp, she looked up at him, feeling smaller than normal. "We're going battle training today." He said, his voice stern.

"In the rain?" She looked around, somewhat concerned. "It's

muddy."

Thornpelt's tail twitched in annoyance. "It won't always be clear skies when you're fighting an enemy. You need to learn to fight in all situations." He didn't wait for a response, he just headed towards the entrance of camp. Dawnpaw quickly followed, catching Lionclaw's eye as he stepped out of the warrior's den but didn't have a moment to talk to him. She and Thornpelt entered the forest, which was just as wet and muddy as the journey into camp from the apprentice den.

Thornpelt pushed through the wet foliage, flicking water droplets onto Dawnpaw. She bit back a growl and bared through it. Every day that the rain fell, Dawnpaw found herself craving the warm, dry season of greenleaf. Trying to ignore the rain, Dawnpaw followed resiliently and keeping her mouth shut.

They soon reached the training area, and the sand was thick from the rain. Thornpelt stared at it for a moment. "We won't train here for the moment. Follow me." Thornpelt walked past the training area into another small clearing. It had several fallen, wet leaves on the ground. Dawnpaw felt uneasy, this didn't look like a particularly good place to train. "This will work." Thornpelt worked then faced Dawnpaw. "When you're fighting in the rain, it's very easy to lose your paws. You need to work on not falling and learn how to get back up quickly if you do fall."

Before Dawnpaw could respond, Thornpelt attacked. His paws hit Dawnpaw directly in the shoulder and her paws slipped on the leaves, kicking up water and mud. She hit the ground, her fur making a slight splash. Thornpelt put his paw inches from Dawnpaw's throat, causing her to nearly panic.

"And now you're dead." Thornpelt growled. "I could've sworn I've taught you to be more alert than that." He let her up and Dawnpaw shook the mud from her pelt, this time she got into a fighting stance, preparing herself for Thornpelt's next attack. As soon as she took her stance, Thornpelt went in for the attack. She readied herself for his attack and lashed forward, trying to cut him off before he could get to her.

However, Thornpelt veered away from her attack, and went right for her side. She could feel his paws digging into her ribs, knocking her back onto the wet ground once more. She hissed in annoyance and jumped back to her paws, slipping on the leaves in the process. While she struggled to gain her balance, Thornpelt attacked again. He knocked her legs out from under her, making her fall to the ground yet again. Dawnpaw didn't have time to get up before he was attacking again.

Dawnpaw rolled out of the way, but his paws landed directly on her stomach. She let out a painful gasp of air as pain spread through her body. "I didn't realize I was fighting a kit." Thornpelt growled, walking away from her. Dawnpaw shakily got to her paws, already feeling the sting of his attacks. "I know it's been awhile since we last trained but I hoped you would at least retain a little skill." He stuck his nose in the air, turning away from Dawnpaw.

Anger sparked inside Dawnpaw, she lashed her tail. *Not my fault it's been raining so much.* Dawnpaw narrowed her eyes, Thornpelt's back was turned and now was the perfect time to attack. She dashed forward, aiming to get on his back. However, the leaves betrayed her and Dawnpaw slid forward. Thornpelt spun around and met her with a sharp paw to the shoulder, knocking her to the side.

"So predictable." Thornpelt snorted. The anger inside Dawnpaw grew, she wasn't giving up until she knocked him down. She got to her paws once more and didn't hesitate to attack. This time, she used the leaves to her advantage and launched herself farther. Dawnpaw landed on Thornpelt's back, a little wobbly, but managed to make the warrior lose his balance. When Thornpelt began to fall he violently jerked his body, throwing Dawnpaw off.

She landed a few taillengths away, hitting the ground hard. She felt the pain biting at her muscles, but she quickly got back up, facing her mentor once more. "You're pathetic, Dawnpaw." Thornpelt spat. "If this was a real battle you'd be dead! You can't protect the cats around you if you're dead." Dawnpaw dug her claws into the muddy ground. "You might as well be killing your brother yourself if you fight like this. Clearly your loved one's lives don't matter."

Anger cracked in Dawnpaw like lightning, she pictured Turtlepaw,

the same way as Sunstream, bleeding and dead. *How dare he say they don't matter!* Dawnpaw launched herself, colliding directly with Thornpelt. She felt his weight give out from under him and he hit the ground with a hefty gasp. For a moment, Dawnpaw couldn't see the world around her, she just felt Thornpelt's body underneath her paws. Then she heard him let out a small mew of pain, and Dawnpaw instantly let go. She stepped back and realized that her claws were unsheathed, and Thornpelt was bleeding from small scratches on his forelegs. Dawnpaw let out a gasp and looked at her mentor.

"I'm so sorry!" She apologized. "I didn't mean to, I just--" Dawnpaw stopped herself when she saw the look in Thornpelt's eyes. For the first time since she became his apprentice, she noticed that there was pride in his eyes.

"Don't apologize, Dawnpaw." Thornpelt said, standing up and looking at his small wounds. "You fight to soft against me, you need to learn to fight harder even against your Clanmates. I'm not saying to use your claws, but you need to find that passion and anger you felt just now. You were able to knock me down with ease when you were mad at me." Dawnpaw blinked, realizing he was right. She looked at her paws, unsure of what to think of what she just did. "You did well, Dawnpaw." Thornpelt mewed, his voice genuine. "I'm proud of you."

Dawnpaw tilted her head slightly, twitching her whiskers. She didn't know how to feel about his compliment. She had been working so hard for Thornpelt's praise, and she finally got it. She just didn't expect it to be like then, after her fears of Thornpelt began to haunt her mind she figured it would never happen.

"Thank you." Dawnpaw replied, her voice low and uncertain. Thornpelt nodded and looked over Dawnpaw. "You're all muddy." He mewed with a slight snort before looking away. "Clean yourself up when you get back to camp, your denmates will appreciate it." Thornpelt turned, shaking mud from his own pelt. "I'll see you back in camp." With a flick of his tail, Thornpelt vanished into the trees.

Dawnpaw stood in place for a moment, she stared at her muddy paws, extending her claws for a moment. She looked back up at the

trees where Thornpelt had disappeared, she felt pride trickling into her chest. Perhaps Thornpelt wasn't so terrifying after all, maybe she just hadn't found a way to connect with him and now she had.

With a rush of excitement, Dawnpaw broke into a sprint towards camp. Even the water splashing up at her while she ran felt good to her. She reached camp in only a few moments with how fast she ran. Before she entered camp she shook her pelt dry, her blood still buzzing from her training and her run.

As she stepped into camp she immediately caught the amber gaze of Lionclaw. The golden warrior lifted his head and padded over to Dawnpaw. "You look like you had a fun time training." He mewed, looking over her pelt.

"It was a bit harder than usual." Dawnpaw replied with a purr. "But I had fun doing it." She padded farther into camp, with Lionclaw at her side.

"Told you that you would warm up to Thornpelt." Lionclaw nudged her. "He's not so bad once you get to know him. We have the same claws." He flexed his large claws, leaving claw marks in the mud. Dawnpaw watched his claws for a moment, then recalled Thornpelt's large claws, claws that also matched Hawktalon's.

"Do they run in your family?" Dawnpaw questioned, looking towards the elder's den. Lionclaw nodded.

"Any one of mine, Goldenleaf's or Fawnheart's kits could have them. If any of us ever have kits." Lionclaw didn't look down at Dawnpaw.

"Think you will?" Dawnpaw asked, her pelt growing hot and the air between them growing awkward.

"Goldenleaf definitely." Lionclaw looked towards his sister. "She loves kits, she's always with Willownose's kits. Fawnheart might have an issue finding a mate with that attitude issue of hers and as for me..." Lionclaw looked down at Dawnpaw with a soft gaz. "I'll have to find the right mate first."

Before Dawnpaw could find the words to reply, her attention was

caught by movement near the nursery. Willownose was making a quick dash towards the medicine cat den, was something wrong with her kits? Then Dawnpaw's eyes moved to Flamekit, Heatherkit and Brackenkit who were sitting outside, looking at each other with concern in their eyes.

"Dovetail can't be having her kits yet, can she?" Lionclaw's mew pulled her attention back, she glanced up at him and saw a hint of concern in his amber eyes. "It's too early for that." *Dovetail's body doesn't react to pregnancy well. When she's expecting kits she doesn't get big enough, she gets sick and she's in constant pain.* Poppyfur's words rang in her mind, she shuffled her paws nervously and looked at Lionclaw.

"I'll be back." She mewed and quickly bounded towards the medicine cat den. Before she could reach it, Willownose and Pebblepaw were stepping outside. Pebblepaw's jaw was filled with herbs and her eyes with fear. "What's going on?" Dawnpaw asked, despite already knowing the answer.

"Dovetail is having her kits." Pebblepaw replied, her voice trembling. "And Poppyfur is out of camp." Dawnpaw tensed, would Pebblepaw be able to handle this on her own? The small apprentice quickly followed Willownose to the nursery and Dawnpaw made sure to follow. If Poppyfur wasn't here, she would make sure to help the best she could.

When Dawnpaw looked inside the nursery she was taken aback by Dovetail's appearance, she was incredibly thin for being an expecting queen, even if she was having her kits early. Her pelt was dull and her face grimacing in pain. Her claws scraped at the bracken and moss of her nest, Dovetail always seemed so peaceful and graceful, Dawnpaw had never seen her like this before.

"Just relax, Dovetail." Pebblepaw purred into her mother's ear while she prepared some herbs. Dawnpaw could tell she was trying to be soothing, but she could also hear the fear in Pebblepaw's voice.

Dovetail weakly raised her head, her dull blue eyes shining when she saw Pebblepaw. "I'm so glad you're here for me." Her head fell gently back into the nest, Pebblepaw looked up at Dawnpaw, her

eyes pleading for help.

Dawnpaw looked around uncomfortable, unsure what to do. She hadn't had anything to do with Willownose's kitting, but stretched her mind to the last time when Dovetail gave birth. She remembered Dovetail having a stick in her mouth. Dawnpaw turned out of the nursery for just a moment and found a decent sized stick for the queen to bite down on.

She returned and nudged the stick towards Dovetail, looking at Pebblepaw who had placed a paw on her mother's belly. Dawnpaw sat beside Dovetail's head watching Pebblepaw work. The silence that had filled the air was shattered with a bone-chilling shriek, Dawnpaw nearly jumped out of her fur and Pebblepaw froze with fear. Dovetail's teeth clamped down on the stick, nearly shattering it with one bite.

"Move out of the way, kits." Dawnpaw and Pebblepaw both perked their heads up to see Poppyfur pushing her way into the den. She looked at Pebblepaw, then to Dawnpaw. "What are you doing here?" She questioned.

"H-helping Pebblepaw." Dawnpaw replied, her voice shaking.

"I suppose you know how to help a queen kit?" The medicine cat questioned but shook her head. "If you're in here you might as well stay and help." Poppyfur moved down to Pebblepaw and placed her paw on the queen's belly just as Pebblepaw had done. "You're doing fine, Dovetail." Poppyfur mewed, her voice steady.

Dovetail didn't respond, but instead let out another screech that made Dawnpaw feel that she really wasn't fine. She shuffled her paws but stayed by Dovetail's head as her claws ripped at the moss of her nest.

"The first kit is coming." Poppyfur mewed. "You can do this, Dovetail. You've done it before." Dovetail's cries grew louder, filling the air with pain and panic. "Here it is," Poppyfur looked towards Willownose who was keeping her three kits at bay. "Willownose, get it's blood flowing." Willownose rushed over and picked up a small bundle of white fur stained with blood. Willownose took the kit and

began licking it furiously.

Another shriek later, and Dawnpaw heard another kit fall into the nest. "You take this one Pebblepaw." The kit Pebblepaw had was a tiny white and gray kit, just like Pebblepaw. "I think there's one more." Poppyfur's green eyes were intently focused on Dovetail. "You're doing great, Dovetail." The only response from the queen was another cry of pain. After a few short moments, another kit came into the world.

"Dawnpaw." Poppyfur grabbed Dawnpaw's attention. "You take this one, lick its fur roughly to get it breathing." Dawnpaw hesitated, unsure what she was doing. "Do it! I need to get Dovetail's bleeding to stop.

Dawnpaw quickly reacted, moving forward and grabbing a tiny ball of gray fur. She set the kit down and began rapidly licking along its spine, roughing up it's fur. The kit twitched and let out a weak mews, but wasn't doing much else. Dawnpaw didn't stop, she kept licking the kit as fast as she could. *Come on little kit!* She cried silently. *Please start moving!* Dawnpaw felt the more she licked, the less the kit moved. Dawnpaw heard a cry from another kit and looked up to see that the gray and white kit had began crying and squirming around. She looked to WIllownose, but the she-cat had stopped licking the kit and her head was low. The white kit wasn't moving, panic gripped Dawnpaw's heart and she returned to licking the gray kit.

"Dawnpaw." She heard the quiet mew of Willownose, the queen was watching her with sad eyes. "You can stop." Her voice was hushed. "It's dead."

"No!" Dawnpaw cried, refusing to believe it. She looked down at the kit, suddenly picturing Willowkit's body. She shoved the image away and kept licking, she heard a sad sigh from Willownose.

"I can't stop the bleeding." Poppyfur's stressed mew pulled Dawnpaw back to reality, she looked up at Poppyfur and saw panic on the she-cat's face. Pebblepaw was beside her watching in horror.

"It's okay, Poppyfur..." Dovetail's mew was weak, yet calming. "You

did everything you could." Her eyes were closed, but her face peaceful. "You always have for me and my kits." Dovetail opened her eyes slowly and looked over at Pebblepaw. "I'm so proud of you, my daughter. You'll be a fantastic medicine cat, her eyes traveled to the single surviving kit. "Take care of this one, he's a fighter just like you." Dovetail turned her head to look at Willownose. "I've been happy to call you my denmate multiple times, Willownose. You're a fantastic mother and I'm so thankful for all you've done for me" Finally, Dovetail turned to Dawnpaw, who was still frozen in fear. "Dawnpaw, thank you so much for all you've done for my kits. You saved Pebblepaw's life and gave her a future and you're a wonderful friend to Cinderpaw and Yarrowpaw. When the time comes....I want you to be the mentor of this kit."

Dawnpaw began trembling, she looked over Dovetail's body and saw the massive amounts of blood in her nest, Dawnpaw could barely stand to look at it, she forced her gaze back to Dovetail's face, but her eyes were closed and her breathing slowed until it came to a complete stop.

The air around Dawnpaw was thick and filled with the scent of blood and fear, she felt like she was suffocating. Dawnpaw quickly ran out of the nursery, nearly missing Willownose's kits and stopped, panting heavily.

"Dawnpaw!" Dawnpaw heard Poppyfur's call, but her mind shut it out. Images flashed in her mind and darkness flooded in around her. She saw the pool of blood that cost Dovetail her life, and the bodies of the two dead kits. Images of Willowkit's death flashed in her mind once more, the sound of her coughing and the spasms of her body. Dawnpaw's claws dug into the earth and she could hear faint mews in the distance. Her body was tense, she couldn't move and breathing was hard. Her legs trembled and she felt stones in her belly.

"Dawnpaw!" A sharp mew finally pulled Dawnpaw back to reality, she opened her eyes and found herself facing Poppyfur. Dawnpaw looked around and noticed that most of the Clan was looking at her well. Lionclaw looked at her with concern in his eyes, and Turtlepaw with straight up fear. "Are you alright?" Dawnpaw looked back at Poppyfur.

"I-I think so." Her voice cracked, Dawnpaw's throat felt dry. "I don't-I don't know what happened."

"It's alright, Dawnpaw." Poppyfur mewed quietly. "Go back to my den, I'll be there in just a moment." Dawnpaw hesitated, but eventually listened. She turned her back on her Clanmates but looked up to see Pebblepaw, her icy blue eyes were filled with pain and grief. There was something else in her eyes too, something Dawnpaw knew all too painfully. Guilt. Dawnpaw wanted to stop and talk to her but Poppyfur beat her to it. Dawnpaw turned away, padding slowly to the medicine cat den.

She felt as if she had just ran around the forest, her body ached and her mind was spinning. Dawnpaw reached the den and sat down, hanging her head low. She couldn't get the image of the dead kits out of her mind, nor the blood that came from Dovetail. Dawnpaw jumped when Poppyfur stepped into the den with Pebblepaw at her side.

The apprentice's head was low, she sat down in a nest and didn't speak or make eye contact. "I'm sorry you had to be there for that, Dawnpaw." Poppyfur mewed quietly. "I should've made you leave."

Dawnpaw looked up in confusion. "I was there to help."

"You didn't need to see that, neither of you did." Poppyfur's voice was sad. "I know it's Pebblepaw's duty but you had no reason to be there, I could've managed without you. I should've told you to leave when Willowkit died as well."

"What?" Dawnpaw replied, tensing at the mention of her sister. "Why do you say that?"

"You were just a kit, you didn't need to lay by your sister as she died, it was incredibly traumatizing. I see that it's taken a serious effect on you now, sending you in panic attacks. I'm sorry, Dawnpaw." Poppyfur's head was low, but after a moment she stood up and came back with some poppy seeds. "Take these, you need to rest. Both of you." Poppyfur handed some some to Pebblepaw and some to Dawnpaw.

Dawnpaw hesitated but watched as Pebblepaw licked up the seeds then curled up into her nest, Dawnpaw looked back at her own poppy seeds. She licked them up as well then rested in the nest. She closed her eyes, and was soon taken in by sleep.

When Dawnpaw woke up, the sun was still shining outside. She lifted her head, feeling like she had slept much longer than that. She blinked heavy sleep out of her eyes and looked at Pebblepaw who was still sleeping, then at Poppyfur who had some leaves. "Did we sleep through the night?" She questioned.

"Yes." Poppyfur replied.

Dawnpaw tensed. "Did we miss Dovetail and the kits' vigil?" She asked in a panic.

"Yes, but it's fine. I know Dovetail would understand. You two needed your rest, and the rest of the Clan understands as well." Poppyfur replied.

"How is the kit?" She questioned, remembering the gray and white kit that survived, did he make it through the night.

"He's alive." Poppyfur replied. "Rockfur named him Cloudkit, and WIllownose is going to take care of him. This is borage, it will help her produce more milk for him."

"Do the other kits have names?" Dawnpaw asked, wondering if the dead kits were named.

"Blizzardkit and Sootkit, both she-cats." Poppyfur replied. "They're with Breezekit and Owlkit now." At Dawnpaw's confusion, Poppyfur added: "Dovetail's first two kits."

Dawnpaw looked at her paws, her heart aching for the lost kits. Now Cloudkit would be growing up without his littermates and his mother. Then Dawnpaw tried to cheer herself up, he may not have his littermates but he still had siblings and his father was still here. *I want you to be his mentor.* Dovetail's dying words rang in Dawnpaw's mind, she wondered if that would actually happen, there was still a long time before that happened however.

"I'm going to go give these herbs to Willownose." Poppyfur replied. "You can leave whenever you feel you're up to it." The medicine cat gave looked at Pebblepaw, then left the den. As soon as the medicine cat was gone, Pebblepaw stirred. She lifted her head and looked around sleepily.

"Did we sleep all night?" She questioned.

Dawnpaw nodded. "We missed the vigil too."

Pebblepaw shrugged and looked away. "I don't think my mother could be any more disappointed in me, I let her and my two sisters die. I don't even want to show my face to my littermates or father. I'm a failure."

"You can't blame yourself, Pebblepaw." Dawnpaw said, her voice a lot more stern than she intended. Pebblepaw looked at her with alarm in her eyes. "It's not your fault that Dovetail died, she shouldn't have had kits in the first place. The kits were born too early, you did everything you could and Dovetail knows that. So do all your siblings, and Cloudkit is alive. Doesn't that matter?" Pebblepaw looked away, pain filling her eyes. "I know what you're going through. I blame myself every day for Willowkit's death, and seeing those kits die..." Her voice broke off, not wanting to slip into a panic again.

"Is that why you were so upset?" Pebblepaw asked, her voice quiet.

Dawnpaw nodded. "It also happened when Sunstream died." She sighed. "But my point is, Pebblepaw." She looked back towards the medicine cat apprentice. "You can't forever blame yourself for the death of Dovetail, you're a wonderful medicine cat and she said it herself; she's so proud of you."

Pebblepaw looked at her, a hint of softness in her eyes. She gave a small nod and looked back at her paws. "Thank you, Dawnpaw. "

"Poppyfur is proud of you too." Dawnpaw replied. "She really cares about you, I can see it."

Pebblepaw's voice sounded lifted. "I want to make her proud, she's a

wonderful mentor."

Dawnpaw nodded and looked towards the den entrance, she took a deep breath, thinking of all the cats that SunClan had lost recently. Even with the loss of Dovetail and two of her kits, Dawnpaw thought of Cloudkit and couldn't help but feel a small glimmer of hope.

Chapter 13

"Flamepaw! Brackenpaw! Heatherpaw!" The cats of SunClan cheered their three newest apprentices, as they bounded around in excitement. Lionclaw, Goldenleaf and Adderstrike were their respective mentors and all three of them looked just as excited. Dawnpaw knew that Fawnheart was upset she wasn't getting an apprentice, but she was their sister, though Dawnpaw didn't think Fawnheart would go very easy on them.

"Where are we going first?" Flamepaw asked Lionpaw eagerly, her green eyes glowing brighter than the sun.

"How about a tour of the territory?" Lionclaw asked with a playful glint in his eyes. Dawnpaw let out a purr and approached Lionclaw.

"Don't forget to teach her all the *boring* tasks like collecting moss." Dawnpaw teased, flicking his ear with her tail.

"Excuse you," Lionclaw held his head up proudly. "I am a very mature mentor who will teach my apprentice every skill she will ever need."

Dawnpaw let out a chuckle. "I have no doubt." She purred and Lionclaw gave a warm look.

"We're denmates now, Dawnpaw!" Flamepaw jumped around the two cats. "Though," She stopped. "Shouldn't you and Turtlepaw be warriors soon?"

Dawnpaw sighed. "We should be." She looked at Thornpelt who was speaking with Applespots. "I hope so."

She felt a nudge from Lionclaw, pulling her attention back to the two of them. "Don't worry, you'll be a warrior before you know it." Dawnpaw felt soothed and grateful for his words. "We should get going, Heatherpaw and Brackenpaw already left." As he and Flamepaw headed for the entrance Lionclaw called over his

shoulder: "I'll see you later, Dawnpaw!" With that, the two of them vanished outside of camp, leaving Dawnpaw alone.

Dawnpaw stood in place for a moment, glancing at the nursery for a moment. Inside was just Willownose and Cloudkit. It had been over a moon since Dovetail died and SunClan was still struggling to adjust without her. Her family is particular was taking it incredibly hard, but they were all constantly visiting Cloudkit.

Dawnpaw sighed and turned away, heading for her mentor. She waited for him to stop his conversation with Applespots before she spoke. "Should I go hunting?" She questioned.

Thornpelt nodded. "Get as much prey as you can, now that the rain stopped I can guarantee that snow is on the way. Hunt as long as possible, but stay away from the AshClan border, they get testy during leaf-bare." Dawnpaw didn't argue, at least she would be by herself. She gave a small nod and turned away, making her way outside the camp. Dawnpaw wasn't quite sure why he wanted her to stay away from the AshClan border, but she would be sure to cover as much ground as possible.

The rain had been over for quite a while but the air was still chilly, SunClan was preparing for leaf-bare. She broke off towards the MoonClan border, hoping to catch a stray rabbit close to the border, there was no accidently crossing a river. She sniffed the air, the cold stinging her nose. She ignored the pain and kept hunting, as she tracked her hopes came true as she caught the scent of rabbit. Dropping into a crouch, Dawnpaw began searching for her prey. Near the river was the rabbit, plump and hunting for food. Dawnpaw extended her claws, keeping her breath silent. With a single step forward, Dawnpaw attacked. The rabbit didn't have any time to react before her claws were sinking into it's body and her teeth biting the back of it's neck, killing it quickly.

Feeling proud of her hunt, Dawnpaw buried her catch and continued. She kept hunting, sniffing around for more prey. She padded along the river, keeping her eye out for any sign of prey but she was starting to think that she got lucky with the rabbit and wouldn't find much else. She had walked more than half-way back to camp before she caught the scent of mouse. Dropping into her

crouch she tracked the mouse down, finding the tiny creature sniffing for seeds. It was incredibly small, but it would be enough to feed Cloudkit.

Dawnpaw pounced, killing the mouse with ease. Dawnpaw buried it and continued, still struggling with finding prey. She couldn't give up, Thornpelt wouldn't allow it and the Clan needed prey. *It's not like I'm the only one hunting.* Dawnpaw reminded herself, she was only hunting like this to please Thornpelt. She shook her head. *No! The Clan needs as much prey as possible.* Ignoring her thoughts, she kept hunting.

After covering nearly all ground between SunClan camp and the MoonClan border and findinding only a squirrel, Dawnpaw decided it was time to go to the other side of the territory. She knew that Thornpelt instructed her to stay away from the AshClan border but she needed the find more prey, and she wouldn't get caught by any AshClan warriors.

Heading towards the AshClan border, Dawnpaw almost immediately caught scent of another squirrel. Dawnpaw caught it quickly and moved on, she was hoping to run into Lionclaw and Flamepaw while she was out but she hadn't seen any sign of them apart of from passing scents. They were probably back in camp by now, she was mildly disappointed but knew she would see Lionclaw back in camp.

Dawnpaw spotted her next piece of prey rather quickly, a plump mouse. She dropped once more into a crouch, and pounced. This one nearly got away from her but she was faster. After her mouse hunt, she found herself closer to the AshClan border than she intended. She grabbed her mouse and was about to turn away when she heard a familiar voice. Her ears perked up as she heard the mew of Echoheart.

Dawnpaw dropped her mouse and hid behind a clump of thick bushes, peering through to see Echoheart. She saw the gray she-cat talking to another cat she couldn't see, but it looked like she was talking to a cat across the border. Dawnpaw situated herself silently, wanting to see who she was talking to. Dawnpaw had to stop herself from gasping when she saw Thornpelt. They were both

on their respective territories but there didn't seem to be any hostility between them. Dawnpaw strained her ears to hear what they were saying.

"How are things going in AshClan?" Thornpelt asked, his voice quiet and serious.

Echoheart snorted. "It's hard to get these cats to take me seriously. If I was still deputy then maybe." She sighed. "My stupid sister doesn't know what she's doing as deputy." *Why are they talking about what's going on in AshClan?* Dawnpaw asked herself.

"At least you were deputy." Thornpelt lashed his tail. "I can't even become deputy until Dawnpaw is made a warrior." Dawnpaw tensed at the mention of her name.

Echoheart groaned. "Then why don't you just tell Flowerstar that you want to make her a warrior?" She questioned.

"I'm waiting for the right time." Thornpelt replied, looking around. "Then there's the issue of Snakewhisker. Flowerstar only chose him because he's mates with her sister, it should've been me a long time ago."

"Remind her, then." Echoheart sat down, licking the white fur on her chest. "If Snakewhisker really isn't cut out for the job, then he probably doesn't want it. His daughter just died right? He's probably upset, and would probably listen to you if you told him he should step down."

Dawnpaw felt uncomfortable listening to this conversation, why would Thornpelt want Snakewhisker to step down from being deputy? Did he really want to be deputy *that* bad?

"Even if I do that, I don't think Dawnpaw would be made a warrior in time. She would still have to go through a warrior assesment, her brother too. Flowerstar were name a new deputy before then."

"Then deal with that deputy the--" Dawnpaw inched closer, not realizing the brittle leaves under her paws that she disturbed, with a very loud noise. Thornpelt spun around, extending his claws and

Echoheart jumped to her paws. "I'm leaving." She said before sprinting into AshClan territory.

Dawnpaw didn't wait to leave, she grabbed her mouse and broke into a sprint across the territory, getting far away from them as fast as possible. She didn't stop until she was nearly to the MoonClan border. She stopped, panting heavily and legs aching. She hadn't run like that in a long time, her entire body hurt and her lungs burned. Why was Thornpelt talking to Echoheart? *And why were talking about making Thornpelt deputy?* Dawnpaw sat down, struggling to catch her breath. She wondered what Echoheart was going to say before Dawnpaw cut her off, how would Thornpelt deal with the new deputy.

Dawnpaw looked up at the sky, the sun was slowly starting to fall. She had to get back to camp, but she was terrified of running into Thornpelt. He would knew she was there, he would find her scent. Would he stick around though? Dawnpaw had to take the chance, she needed to retrieve her prey. She took her time doing so, but hesitated before walking into camp.

She took a deep breath, stepping into camp and immediately looking for Thornpelt. She didn't spot the tabby warrior and pressed farther into camp. Dawnpaw set her fresh-kill on the pile, preparing to take her mouse to Cloudkit.

"Is that what you caught?" Thornpelt's voice sent fear racing through Dawnpaw's blood, she jumped around to face him. Thornpelt narrowed his eyes. "Something wrong?" He questioned.

"No." Dawnpaw replied, trying to keep her voice steady. There was something in his amber eyes, something that sent chills along Dawnpaw's spine, but she didn't break eye contact.

"You stayed away from the AshClan border, right?" Thornpelt questioned, looking down at her.

"I did." Dawnpaw replied, trying to summon all her courage. Would he call her out on her lie? "Did you go out at all?" If he said yes then he was admitting to meeting Echoheart.

"I did not. I was helping in camp." Thornpelt and Dawnpaw held their gazes for what felt like an eternity, neither one of them breaking it. "Good job." Thornpelt finally said before turning away, leaving Dawnpaw in a near panic. She stared at her paws, trying to catch her shaky breath.

Dawnpaw looked to see where Thornpelt was going and noticed that he was padding over to Snakewhisker and Stormwind, Dawnpaw grew tense. What was he talking to Snakewhisker about?

"You in there?" Dawnpaw felt a poke in her side that sent her nearly into a panic attack, she jumped away from the cat and her fur puffed out in all directions. She turned to see Lionclaw, relief filling her heart. "Woah there," Lionclaw chuckled. "Someone is extra jumpy today."

Dawnpaw flattened her fur which burned with embarrassment. "Sorry," She replied. "Just tired. Long day." She noticed that Thornpelt and Snakewhisker had broken away from Stormwind and were now talking together.

"You need some rest and some prey then." Lionclaw mewed, pulling her attention back. "You go sit by the old apprentice den, I'll bring us some prey to share."

"I was going to bring Cloudkit the mouse I caught." Dawnpaw replied, turning away from him. Lionclaw moved in front of her, blocking her from the fresh-kill pile with playful eyes.

"I'll have Flamepaw do it, you need to relax. I can see the stress written all over your pelt." He nudged her away and towards the old den. "Go on, I'll meet you over there." Dawnpaw hesitated, but eventually listened to him. She slowly padded over to the old apprentice den, keeping her eyes on Snakewhisker and Thornpelt.

She sat down, still watching them. Snakewhisker lowered his head, said something to Thornpelt who nodded in return. Then Snakewhisker turned away, going back to Stormwind. They spoke for a few moments then touched their muzzles together lovingly.

"What're you looking at?" Lionclaw asked as he approached her

with a squirrel in he jaws, setting it down and sitting beside her. Dawnpaw turned away from Snakewhisker and Stormwind.

"Nothing." She replied quietly, staring at the squirrel that he had brought. She didn't take a bit, her mind was too focused on what she saw Thornpelt doing with Echoheart.

"Dawnpaw." Lionclaw's serious tone drew her gaze up to him. His amber eyes were filled with concern. "What's wrong with you? I know something's up. You can talk to me." Dawnpaw felt a small stab of guilt, she was worrying Lionclaw and she didn't like that. "Is this about Dovetail? Or what Flamepaw said earlier?"

Dawnpaw shook her head. "No, I just--" She broke off when she saw Snakewhisker going to Flowerstar's den, his head hanging low.

"Dawnpaw." Lionclaw's voice was sharper this time, she looked at him and quickly looked away when she saw the look in his eyes.

"I'm sorry." She mewed. "It's hard to explain. I'm just stressed out and I guess it's a combination of different things." She felt horrible for not telling him what was actually going on, but she didn't feel comfortable telling anyone anything just yet.

"It's okay, I can tell you're not ready to talk and that's okay. You can tell me when you're ready." Lionclaw nuzzled her cheek, sending sparks across her pelt. "Eat some of this, you need it." Dawnpaw looked at him gratefully and leaned down to take a bite, not realizing how hungry she actually was.

She and Lionclaw shared the squirrel and she was actually starting to relax, her mind finally free of Thornpelt for the first time all day. Until she saw Snakewhisker and Flowerstar exiting the SunTree, she said something to him which he replied to with a nod then jumped up to the SunTree.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Flowerstar called, Dawnpaw tensed.

"What's this about?" Lionclaw asked.

"I don't know." Dawnpaw couldn't control she shakiness in her

voice, but she followed Lionclaw when he stood up to join the group.

"I have just spoken with Snakewhisker." Flowerstar spoke. "And he doesn't feel like he is cut out to be deputy at the moment." The cats of SunClan shared confused murmurs, Dawnpaw ducked her head, Thornpelt had talked him out of being deputy. "I will let Snakewhisker speak for himself."

Snakewhisker stepped forward, his green eyes uneasy. "I'm sorry to have let you all down this way, but I don't know if I was ever ready to be deputy. With the recent loss of Dovetail it's been even harder to focus on my duties. A deputy is a cat who could lead the Clan someday, and I don't see that for myself. I'm sorry." Snakewhisker lowered his head.

"None of us think any less of you, Snakewhisker." Crowfur spoke up. "You've served us well while you were deputy." The Clan mewed in agreement, Dawnpaw could see the relief on Snakewhisker's face.

"Now with Snakewhisker stepping down, I must name a new deputy." Flowerstar raised her voice. "I say these words before the spirit of StarCan so they may hear and approve my choice. Blazeheart will be the new deputy of SunClan!" Dawnpaw's jaw dropped, her father was the new deputy?

Blazeheart stepped forward, his amber eyes filled with surprise, excitement and shock. "I was expecting this, but I promise you that I will be the best deputy I can be."

"Blazeheart! Blazeheart!" The Clan cheered. Dawnpaw couldn't contain her excitement, she bounded over to her father as her brother and mother joined him as well.

"You're deputy now!" Turtlepaw exclaimed. "That's awesome!"

"I'm so proud." Windflight purred, brushing up against Blazeheart. "You'll be a wonderful deputy."

"I hope so." Blazeheart replied, nudging his mate. While they were enjoying the moment Dawnpaw felt something cold land on her

nose, she looked up towards the sky. It was snowing.

"The first snow." Windflight spoke. "It's officially leaf-bare." Dawnpaw felt a twinge of excitement, she was excited to finally see snow. She looked around the camp to see the cats of SunClan looking at the sky as well. Except one cat wasn't.

Dawnpaw caught the gaze of Thornpelt who was looking at her and her family. She tensed, remembering his conversation with Echoheart. What was the other way he could "deal" with a deputy? Was Blazeheart in danger?

Chapter 14

The snow was heavy, forming thick banks around the SunClan camp, most cats found it difficult to hunt with their bright golden and brown coats, Dawnpaw was one of them. Her golden brown tabby stripes stuck out against the white forest like blood. This made hunting even more difficult, and Thornpelt's punishments even harsher.

She was low to the ground, her body trembling slightly from the cold, bitter air. Dawnpaw crept forward, a starling was perched on the hard snow, searching for food. Dawnpaw moved slowly forward, her pads just grazing the snowflakes under them. When she was close enough, she pounced. Unfortunately, as soon as she was out of the brush, her bright coat gave her away and her prey escaped.

"You can do better than that." Thornpelt growled, watching from a few tail lengths away. "It's almost like you don't want to be a warrior."

"I should've been a warrior a long time ago." Dawnpaw snapped back, and was welcomed with a swipe to her ear in response. Something that hadn't happened in a long time.

"You'll become a warrior when I say you're ready to!" Thornpelt spat. "I'd sooner wait until Willownose's kits are warriors before I name you a warrior when you can't even catch a bird!"

"It's not my fault my pelt is so bright in the snow!" Dawnpaw hissed, lashing her tail. Thornpelt swiped at her again but she ducked out of the way, his eyes sparked with anger.

"Icepetal and Snowtail's pelts are pure white and they somehow manage to hunt during every other season. Rainears and Crowfur has black fur and they make due in leaf-bare. Stop complaining and learn to work with your surroundings!"

Dawnpaw didn't respond, she turned with a grumble. It had been nearly two moons since Blazeheart was made deputy and Dawnpaw spotted Thornpelt talking with Echoheart about becoming deputy. She knew for a fact that Thornpelt knew she'd seen the conversation, but neither of them mentioned it. Instead, Thornpelt's training had become harsher than ever and she hated it. Even the tiniest mistake was met with harsh ridicule and punishment.

"Better watch your tongue before it gets you in trouble." There was an edge to Thornpelt's voice, like a claw cutting into her. Was he threatening her? Dawnpaw narrowed her eyes, Thornpelt met her gaze, it burned into her like fire, clearly he was aware of her suspicions.

"I'm going to continue hunting." Dawnpaw said, breaking the intense gaze.

"Don't come back to camp till you have at least five pieces of prey." Thornpelt snarled and turned into the icy forest, leaving Dawnpaw alone. She let out an angry huff and decided to continue her hunt. She moved silently, paws barely crunching the snow under her paws.

Dawnpaw kept her eyes peeled for prey, her luck struck when she spotted a plump, gray rabbit. SunClan didn't normally eat rabbits, she must be close enough to MoonClan territory that the rabbits were in SunClan territory. They would never turn down fat prey like that, especially in leaf-bare. Dawnpaw dropped into a crouch, flattening herself to the ground, her white belly fur brushing the snow. She was heading into the open, she would have to rely more on silence and hoping her prey wouldn't turn around.

With careful paw steps, Dawnpaw carried herself forward towards the rabbit. Her tail curled around her side, she had never lost Sunstream's trick. Dawnpaw was nearing the rabbit, it hadn't noticed her presence yet. She braced herself for a moment, then shot forward paws first. She grasped the rabbit and killed it cleanly.

Proud of her catch, Dawnpaw buried it under the snow and continued her hunt. Luck ran out on Dawnpaw quickly, it was nearly night by the time she had managed to catch four more pieces

of fresh-kill which was three moderate sized squirrels and a stringy mouse. The elders would appreciate the rabbit greatly though, and the nursery could have the squirrels as well as Poppyfur and Pebblepaw. She gathered her collection and returned to camp. Cats huddled outside their dens as the sun fell below the horizon, leaving them chilled.

Dawnpaw kept her eyes peeled for Thornpelt who was sitting outside the Warriors den close to Applespots. They seemed to be talking quite close. Dawnpaw padded to the fresh-kill pile and deposited her catch. Thornpelt spotted her between the entrench and where she was and stood up.

"About time you got back." Thornpelt said with hatred in his voice.

"I got the prey didn't I?" Dawnpaw retorted, too tired and cold to care if she made her mentor mad. "I'm taking my rabbit to the elders." She grasped her rabbit in her jaws and moved across camp, Hawktalon and Nightwing thanked her kindly and she left the elders den.

Thornpelt had retired to the warriors den so she assumed he had nothing more for her to do. Dawnpaw let out a groan of relief and left the camp to the apprentice den, she swore she could hear her nest calling her name. The apprentices were all in their nests except for her, she happily took her place beside Turtlepaw and quickly drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

Dawnpaw had grown accustomed to the routine of waking up at dawn, have battle training till sunhigh, go on a patrol then have hunting practice the rest of the day, but it was taking a toll on her. Her muscles burned and ached with each fight and pounce, her lungs burned after battling her mentor and she was always exhausted. She never had a moment to talk to Turtlepaw, Cinderpaw, Yarrowpaw, or Lionclaw. The other apprentices enjoyed their training, but to Dawnpaw it felt like a chore, she resented Thornpelt and his torment. She just wanted to be a warrior, she knew that Rainears had been talking about making Turtlepaw a warrior. Thornpelt had not been making the same comments about Dawnpaw.

Thornpelt was currently on a patrol, Dawnpaw waited in the camp for his return, shivering by the Drinking Pool. Five cats entered the camp, not Thornpelt but Icepetal, Applespots, Crowstep, Lionclaw and Flamepaw. Each had a piece of prey, Lionclaw made eye contact with Dawnpaw, the look her gave her warmed her heart. They each dropped prey on the fresh-kill pile while Flamepaw took a few pieces to the nursery.

Dawnpaw noticed Lionclaw moving over to her. "Morning my little busy bee." He purred.

Dawnpaw purred with amusement. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't get to see you anymore." He sat close to her, Dawnpaw felt the warmth coming off him, she enjoyed it "I miss talking with you."

"Well you're a warrior now, you're doing different things than me." She replied, she noticed an odd look in his eyes. "But I miss you too."

Lionclaw purred and looked towards the camp entrance. "Looks like you're gonna be pulled away from me again." Dawnpaw looked in that direction, Thornpelt had entered the camp with a determined look in his eyes.

Dawnpaw let out a sigh and stood up. "Time for battle training I suppose." She moved across the camp, her muscles begging her to not fight but she knew she had to. Before she could speak to her mentor, however, he silenced her.

"I need to speak with Flowerstar." He said.

"She's in her den, talking with Stormwind." Lionclaw said, Dawnpaw realized he had followed her. Thornpelt moved to the SunTree to speak with Flowerstar.

"What was that about?" Lionclaw questioned with a snort.

"Who knows." Dawnpaw sighed and sat down. "Could be anything with him."

"Think he's talking to Flowerstar about making you a warrior?"

Lionclaw asked with excitement sparking in his eyes.

Dawnpaw looked away, remembering their conversation from the day before. "I doubt it." She mewed with a sigh.

"Chin up." Lionclaw mewed, brushing his tail under her chin. "It's coming soon, I can feel it."

Dawnpaw looked at him kindly, but turned away when she heard the shuffling of paws from the SunTree. Dawnpaw noticed that Blazeheart's attention had also been caught, he watched both Flowerstar and Thornpelt with interest as they left the leader's den. Flowerstar jumped up onto the tree and Blazeheart quickly padded over to take his place.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting." Flowerstar called and the Clan gathered quickly, sharing confused glances. Dawnpaw looked for her brother, she spotted him beside Rainears looking just as confused. Was it really going to be her warrior ceremony?"

"Thornpelt came to me while he was out hunting claiming that he spotted a badger on SunClan territory." Flowerstar explained. Dawnpaw tensed. A badger? She had never faced a badger before, but she had heard stories.

"A badger?" Willownose echoed, casting a glance over her shoulder at the nursery where Cloudkit was most likely sleeping. Dawnpaw could see the concern in her eyes, as if Cloudkit was her own son.

"I'll let Thornpelt explain." Flowerstar nodded towards Thornpelt who stepped forwards, addressing the Clan.

"It was near Jagged Rocks," Thornpelt began. "It wasn't very old and not very big. A simple patrol could drive it out easily."

"I'll lead it." Blazeheart stepped forward, and Dawnpaw couldn't help but notice the glare that he shared with Thornpelt. It almost seemed like a challenge. He looked around at the cats of SunClan. "Lionclaw you can come with me, and..."

"I want Dawnpaw to join." Thornpelt cut off Blazeheart, shocking

Dawnpaw as well as Blazeheart.

"Are you kidding?" Blazeheart said, getting incredibly defensive "She's just an apprentice."

"She's strong." Thornpelt said, Dawnpaw was confused, he almost never praised her. "She can handle it."

"She's my daughter." Blazeheart was getting hostile.

"She's my apprentice, I've trained her and she's a wonderful fighter." Thornpelt said. "You can't always protect her Blazeheart, she's going to be a warrior."

Blazeheart narrowed his eyes and opened his mouth to speak but it was cut off by Rainears. "I think it's a good idea, Turtlepaw could go as well and it could be their assessment." Blazeheart looked around uncomfortable, clearly not okay with the idea of his kits fighting a badger.

"If they're going then I'm going to." Windflight spoke up from the crowd, stepping forward. Blazeheart's eyes softened, then he looked to Turtlepaw, Dawnpaw and Lionclaw. He gave a small nod then glanced towards Flowerstar.

"Is this patrol alright with you?" He asked the leader.

Flowerstar nodded. "Just be careful, all of you." With a wave of her tail, Flowerstar jumped down from the SunTree and the meeting parted.

"You can do this, Turtlepaw." Dawnpaw heard Rainears talking with Turtlepaw. "I'll see you when you get back, warrior."

Turtlepaw dipped his head and joined with the battle patrol. "Let's take care of this quickly and safely." Blazeheart mewed. "Dawnpaw, if things turn bad I want you to run back to camp for help. According to Thornpelt it's young and small so we shouldn't have an issue. If any of you are too hurt to continue, I want you to stop immediately." He looked at each cat in turn. "Let's go."

The patrol started for the camp's back entrance as the other

members of SunClan wished them good luck. Before Dawnpaw left camp she caught Thornpelt's gaze, she couldn't help but see malice in them. She shook her head and followed her family out of camp.

"Don't be nervous." Lionclaw mewed, standing beside Dawnpaw. "Just think, we get this done quickly and when we get back," His eyes glowed. "You're a warrior."

Dawnpaw nodded, feeling slightly more comforted by his words. "I just have a bad feeling." Her mind flashed back to the last time she had fought a dangerous creature, Tigertail had died. She remembered the moment of Tigertail's death, the way he appeared to trip when trying to run. Thornpelt was right beside him, Dawnpaw tensed. Did Thornpelt trip him? Dawnpaw shook her head, there was no way that Thornpelt would cause the death of his own brother. *Unless he wanted to be deputy...* Dawnpaw couldn't silence the thought, but they were stopped when a foul stench flooded her nose.

"That's badger scent." Windflight mewed. "We're getting close to it." Dawnpaw tensed, looking around for any sign of the creature. They weren't too far from Jagged Rocks and that was where Thornpelt said it was. They pushed forward, the nasty scent getting stronger and stronger.

Dawnpaw spotted the shadow of something large near Jagged Rocks. "Is that it?" Dawnpaw asked, motioning towards the shadow and trying to control her voice from trembling.

"I think so." Blazeheart replied, then looked at the patrol. "Remember what I told you all." He began creeping forward quietly, the rest of the patrol copied him. Dawnpaw glanced at Lionclaw who looked completely focused, she turned back to Jagged Rocks. The badger lumbered out from behind Jagged Rocks, her jaw dropping when she saw how massive the creature was.

"That's Thornpelt's definition of small?" Turtlepaw mewed, sounding shocked and afraid. Blazeheart hesitated but looked over at his shoulder.

"We can still do this. Go on my call." Blazeheart flattened himself

against the ground, as the rest of the patrol did. Dawnpaw took a deep breath, she and her family would be alright. They had to be. "Now!" At Blazeheart's call they ran at the badger. The creature let out a growl as the cats swarmed it.

Blazeheart reached it first, jumping onto its shoulder and raking his claws through its fur. Dawnpaw and the others soon reached it as well, attacking from all angles. Dawnpaw went for the creature's hind leg, biting down into the thick, foul smelling fur. Learning from her experience with the fox, she moved away before she could get kicked. Dawnpaw quickly went back in at full force, digging her claws deep into the badger's flesh.

She heard a hiss of pain and stopped to see Lionclaw stumbling backwards, he had five bloody claw marks down his side, but none of them looked very deep and he jumped right back on the badger. Dawnpaw barely had to time react as the badger's jaws nearly clamped down around her head. She fell to the ground, the snapping sound right next to ear and flecking her with spit.

She scrambled away, taking a short moment to compose herself. Windflight and Blazeheart fought almost in sync, slashing and biting with quick movements. Windflight had blood welling from her shoulder, Blazeheart had a wound over his eye and Turtlepaw had a small wound on his leg, but they all kept fighting.

Dawnpaw dove back into the fight, going up the badger's back. She dug her claws into its spine, holding on tight as the badger attempted to buck her off. Dawnpaw held on tightly, hooking her claws into its flesh. With a large heave, the badger succeeded and Dawnpaw's claws ripped through it's skin as she was launched off.

Dawnpaw hit the ground hard, winding her. Snow flew up around her, but she got back to her paws. "Are you okay?" Lionclaw called to her.

"Yeah!" Dawnpaw replied and ran back towards the badger, claws first. She sank her claws into its flank and bit down, ignoring the bitter taste of its blood. She could hear the badger crying in pain as it tried fending off the five cats, but it was struggling and bleeding from multiple wounds.

"Keep it up!" Blazeheart called, slashing at the badger's nose. The badger was getting angrier with each moment, shouting and crying in pain and anger. It snapped at the cats and slashed its monstrous paws. Blazeheart ran around the badger, making it spin as it chased him. Dawnpaw and the others kept attacking as he kept it focused on him.

The badger let out a shrill cry of anger and waved its paw once more. However, this time it hit Blazeheart. Dawnpaw watched in horror as her father was flung away from the battle, hitting the ground and not getting back up.

Breaking away from the fight, Dawnpaw ran up to her father's body. She couldn't hold back a wail of alarm as she noticed his wounds. Five long claw marks ran up Blazeheart's body, from his side and up his stomach. They were deep and pouring blood, Blazeheart's amber eyes were wide with pain and shock.

"Blazeheart!" She cried, getting closer to her father. She felt his blood staining her white paws. "Get up! You have to! We need you!" Dawnpaw's legs trembled, she couldn't take her eyes off of the claw marks.

Blazeheart opened his mouth to speak, but blood trickled out of his mouth and he went still after a moment. Dawnpaw stepped forward, pain and fear crippling her heart. "Blazeheart, no!" She cried.

"Dawnpaw!" She heard the cry of Lionclaw but couldn't turn away from Blazeheart. "Come back over here, we need you! You can't help him now!"

"Shut up!" Dawnpaw spat, whirling on her paws, she could see the hurt in his eyes. He turned away, running back into the battle. Windflight and Turtlepaw had both noticed Blazeheart, but they kept fight. She had to keep fighting too, for him. Dawnpaw took a shaky breath and ran back in, her paws trembling.

Dawnpaw slashed weakly at the badger, but drew blood. Turtlepaw jumped up, latching onto the side of the badger's head and biting down on it's ear and pulling. The badger cried and pulled Turtlepaw

off with a large paw, Turtlepaw hit the ground with a thud, sending panic through Dawnpaw but got up quickly.

Windflight let out a hiss of rage and lunged for the badger's face, landing square on it's head. "You hurt my family!" She cried. "You take my mate from me! I won't let you live!" Windflight slashed with the fury of an entire Clan, her claws ripping into the badger's face. The badger cried in pain, Windflight's claws ripped up its muzzle and eyes until a strong headshake knocked her off.

Before Windflight could get up, the badger bit down on her head and lifted her from the ground.

"No!" Turtlepaw and Dawnpaw cried, running to their mothers side but before they could reach her, the badger threw her with force. Windflight's body flew towards Jagged Rocks, they could only watch as she hit the rocks with a sickening snap, and dropped limply to the base of the rocks.

Dawnpaw's legs gave out from under her, she hit the ground unable to breathe or focus. She heard the badger crying in pain, but she also heard it running away. She didn't care, her mind was whirling with images of blood and the sound of her mother hitting the rocks. *This isn't happening.* Dawnpaw told herself. *This can't be happening!*

She felt sick, her entire body felt cold and she couldn't move. The world around her blurred into blackness, she couldn't hear anything but the roaring of her own blood in her ears and the cries of her parents as they died.

Dawnpaw felt a warmth next to her, slowly pulling out of her darkness. Her eyes struggled to focus but she notice that Turtlepaw was pressing up against her. She looked at him and saw the pain in his eyes, the same pain she was feeling. She let out a wail and pressed into Turtlepaw, wanting to disappear, wanting to go back to when she was a kit, when Willowkit and her parents were still alive.

Dawnpaw and Turtlepaw trembled together, staying close. "I'm so sorry, Dawnpaw." Turtlepaw breathed almost silently. "I couldn't..." His voice cracked.

"It's not your fault." Dawnpaw whimpered, burying her face in her brother's brown fur. She didn't know what else to say, she couldn't find any words. Her entire world had shattered right before her eyes. The sight of Blazeheart's bloody wounds flashed in her mind, followed by the sound of her mother's body breaking.

"We need to get back to camp." Lionclaw spoke, his voice sad and quiet. Dawnpaw opened her eyes and slowly pulled her head away from Turtlepaw. She looked up and saw the golden tom with sadness in his eyes. "We'll send for cats to come retrieve their bodies, but you two need to get back to camp."

Turtlepaw and Dawnpaw shared an unsure glance, she didn't want to leave her parents behind, but neither of them had the energy to argue. They stood up, leaning on each other for strength.

Lionclaw led the way as Turtlepaw and Dawnpaw followed slowly behind, she hadn't felt a sadness like this since Willowkit's death, and somehow it hurt even more. Every paw step was harder, she didn't want to go back to camp. She didn't want to go to sleep, she didn't want to live a future without her parents.

However, she followed and they soon reached camp. She didn't even bother to look up at her Clanmates, but she heard the voice of Flowerstar.

"Did you drive it out?" Flowerstar stopped abruptly. "Where's Blazeheart and Windflight?"

"The badger is gone," Lionclaw replied, his voice weak. "But Blazeheart and Windflight were killed."

"Both of them?" Flowerstar's voice cracked.

"Turtlepaw and Dawnpaw need to be looked after," Dawnpaw heard the voice of Stormwind. "They needs herbs and rest."

Dawnpaw looked up for just a moment, noticing the horror in Flowerstar's green eyes. "So much death..." She murmured, then raised her voice which was still trembling. "I'm not quite ready to name a new deputy," She looked at Snakewhisker who stood by

Stormwind, his eyes wide with alarm. "Snakewhisker, can you act as a temporary deputy until I decide."

"Of course, Flowerstar." Snakewhisker replied.

Dawnpaw and Turtlepaw were turned away from the conversation by Poppyfur. "Come on you two." She said softly, guiding them to the medicine cat den. Behind her, Dawnpaw could hear Lionclaw speaking.

"Maybe you should get your eyes checked, Thornpelt." He growled. "That badger was *not* small."

"Clearly I made a mistake." Thornpelt replied, his voice stiff.

"Your mistake got two cats killed. We should've had a much bigger patrol." Dawnpaw didn't get to hear the rest of the conversation as she reached the medicine cat den. Both her and Turtlepaw sat silently as Poppyfur and Pebblepaw worked on their wounds.

"You two should get some sleep in your dens tonight." Poppyfur suggested, but Dawnpaw looked up in annoyance.

"I'm *not* missing my parents' vigil." She growled. "I'll get some sleep afterwards." She dropped her head once more.

"I'm not either." Turtlepaw added, pressing against Dawnpaw.

"Very well." Poppyfur sighed without argument.

The day continued on slowly, until it was time for the vigil. Dawnpaw and Turtlepaw walked side by side to where their parent's bodies lie in the center of camp, ignoring the rest of the Clan. They sat down and Dawnpaw looked over Blazeheart and Windflight's bodies. Arranged as if they were sleeping, Dawnpaw wasn't sure how to feel about that. She wished they were sleeping, she wished with all of her might that would wake up and act like nothing ever happened. A wish that would never come true.

"What do we do without them?" Dawnpaw asked her brother quietly, her voice breaking.

"We be the best warriors we can be." Turtlepaw replied, pressing closer to her. "We'll make them proud." Dawnpaw nodded, unsure if she could do that. She couldn't picture the Clan without her parents, without seeing Blazeheart and Windflight so in love with each other. She couldn't form it in her mind. She wished she could. "But we don't have to right now," Turtlepaw added. "Right now, we can honor their memory. We can be sad, and I'll always, always be here for you, Dawnpaw. I promise."

"I'll be here too." Dawnpaw touched muzzles with her brother, Turtlepaw was the only family she had left, and she would make sure she never lost him.

Chapter 15

Dawnpaw stared at the sky, the snow had stopped falling but the ground was still covered in it. She let out a sigh, her breath billowing out in front of her in the frozen air. She looked at her paws, she couldn't stop picturing them covered with her father's blood. She closed her eyes, forcing away the image. Dawnpaw stared into the forest, it felt silent and still. Her world hadn't felt the same since her parent's died, in the two days since she barely slept or ate. She wanted to go back in time, back before the badger. Wishing she could tell the patrol to take more cats, wishing to tell her mother and father to stay behind.

Dawnpaw closed her eyes, imagining her parent's faces, alive and happy. Looking at her with eyes full of love and pride. She lowered her head, they were in StarClan now, back with Willowkit. Was she selfish for wanting them here with her and Turtlepaw instead?

"Dawnpaw." Dawnpaw opened her eyes when she heard the voice of Thornpelt, she was too sad to care about being scared of him. She looked at him, unable to read his expression. "Let's talk." Dawnpaw hesitated, she was waiting for Turtlepaw to wake up, but she listened and stood up without speaking.

Thornpelt led her away from the apprentice den, closer to the moss hollow. Dawnpaw felt uncomfortable walking this path, the path that lead to Jagged Rocks. She avoided looking in that direction and instead stared at the forest floor.

"I apologize for the loss of your parents, Dawnpaw." Thornpelt said, looking off into the trees. "I underestimated the size of that badger." Dawnpaw looked up, anger bubbling up inside her, she dug her claws into the frozen ground.

"Or you didn't." She growled. "You sent us there knowing that it was too big to handle, in hopes that it would kill my father."

Thornpelt stared her down, Dawnpaw held his gaze intently. The

tabby tom stepped forward and Dawnpaw didn't move. "You really think I would do something like that?"

"I saw you talking with Echoheart, and you know I did." Dawnpaw replied, her voice curling into a growl.

"Let's face it, Dawnpaw." He turned away, a hint of laughter in his mew that made her feel sick. "I'll be a much better deputy than your father. If Snakewhisker can't handle being deputy because he lost a daughter, why could Blazeheart? A cat never gets over the loss of their kit."

Dawnpaw's pelt bristled. How dare he speak of Willowkit. "You killed my parents!" Dawnpaw spat, all her rage coming out at once. "You're a murderer!"

Thornpelt whirled on her, causing Dawnpaw to jump backwards away from him. "I haven't killed a single cat, Dawnpaw." Thornpelt hissed, towering over her. "Foxes, badgers and other cats have killed but not me. I have not killed a single cat."

Dawnpaw couldn't breathe, she stared up at her mentor and bared her teeth. "I'm not a warrior, you can't even become deputy yet."

"That's where you're wrong." Thornpelt flicked his tail. "If you remember, I turned this into a warrior assessment for both you and your brother. As far as Rainears and I are concerned, you passed. You two will be made warriors and I will be made deputy." Dawnpaw stood frozen, unable to believe what she was hearing. Thornpelt began walking away. "You should prepare for your ceremony, Dawnpaw." Giving one, last, dark look over his shoulder "I know I'll be preparing for mine."

Thornpelt vanished into the woods back towards camp, leaving Dawnpaw alone. She stood in silence, her breathing short. Thornpelt had not only caused the death of Blazeheart but Tigertail as well, and more than likely the death of Sunstream as well. *He probably had Echoheart kill her so he could become my mentor.* The thought plagued Dawnpaw's mind, she sat down, unable to think of anything else.

She was finally able to move when she heard Turtlepaw's call from the apprentice den, Dawnpaw quickly got her paws and hurried back to the apprentice den where Turtlepaw stood. "Where were you?" He questioned once she got into view.

"I went for a walk." Dawnpaw replied, she didn't think she could tell him about Thornpelt, he was struggling enough. "We should go to camp." Dawnpaw mewed, pressing up against her brother.

"Yeah." Turtlepaw said without much emotion his voice. Dawnpaw stuck close by him as they walked to camp together, once inside every cat looked at them with pity in their eyes. Dawnpaw hated it, she hated the pity and she hated the way they look at her. Dawnpaw did her best to avoid the glances of her Clanmates.

Dawnpaw and Turtlepaw were stopped by Rainears and Thornpelt, Dawnpaw avoided Thornpelt's gaze the best she could but she could feel it cutting into her pelt. "We've been talking, as well as with Flowerstar," Rainears mewed, her voice gentle. "And if you're both up to it, we believe that you're more than ready to earn your warrior names. I know it's hard, with the loss of your parents but we all think it's time."

Turtlepaw looked at Dawnpaw, she shared his sad gaze. "Do you think we should do it now?" He questioned.

Dawnpaw looked at her brother, then moved her gaze to Thornpelt who stared at her expectantly. She turned away, looking at the ground. Did she want to become a warrior now? If she did, then Thornpelt would become deputy. However, Dawnpaw knew it was time for them both to become warriors, and she would be free from being Thornpelt's apprentice. Dawnpaw looked up, meeting her brother's gaze once more. "I think we should," She mewed. "Windflight and Blazeheart would want us to."

Turtlepaw's eyes were soft and he nodded, looking back at Rainears who had pride glowing in her blue eyes. Dawnpaw wished she could get that same pride from her mentor, once again she wished that Sunstream was still her mentor. "We'll go speak to Flowerstar then." Thornpelt said, turning away and walking with his sister back to the SunTree.

"Are you ready to become a warrior?" Turtlepaw asked once they were gone, his green eyes staring at the leaf-bare sky.

"I think so." Dawnpaw mewed with a slight sigh. "We've worked hard for it, both of us have."

"You're right." Turtlepaw looked back at her, his expression soft and caring. Dawnpaw nuzzled him and looked towards the SunTree. "I suppose the meeting will be here soon." Turtlepaw nodded, and as he did so Flowerstar stepped out of the SunTree with Snakewhisker following her.

"That's probably it." Dawnpaw said and the two of them headed for the SunTree as Flowerstar climbed to the top.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Flowerstar called, Dawnpaw couldn't help but notice her voice sounded exhausted and sad. The Clan gathered, and Dawnpaw caught Lionclaw's gaze. She hadn't spoken to him since her parents died, and she felt bad for snapping at him when Blazeheart died, but his amber eyes were soft when he looked at her.

"Two days ago SunClan suffered a tragedy." Flowerstar began once SunClan had gathered, Dawnpaw could feel several eyes on her but ignored them. She stayed close to her brother where she felt comfortable. "We lost Blazeheart and Windflight, both incredibly brave and loyal warriors who will forever be missed." Dawnpaw lowered her head. "But, they would want us to continue Clan life. First of all, Blazeheart was Cinderpaw's mentor and she needs a new one so her training can continue." Dawnpaw looked over at Cinderpaw, the dark gray she-cat had her head lowered and her amber eyes were sad. Dawnpaw felt a stab of guilt, she knew how hard it was to lose a mentor, she should've been there for Cinderpaw especially so soon after she lost her mother.

"Crowfur," Flowerstar spoke, getting the attention of the black she-cat. "You are a strong and intelligent warrior, I trust that you will take great care in continuing Cinderpaw's training."

"I will, Flowerstar." Crowfur looked at Cinderpaw with caring eyes

and stepped forward to touch noses with her new apprentice.

"Next, I would like to honor two apprentices. They have suffered a great loss, but they are more than ready to earn their warrior names." Dawnpaw took a deep breath, she felt Turtlepaw do the same. "Turtlepaw and Dawnpaw, please step forward." Dawnpaw looked at her brother who gave a tiny nod, and they stepped into the center of the group, Flowerstar jumped down to face them. "Turtlepaw and Dawnpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do." Turtlepaw didn't hesitate, Dawnpaw could hear the pride and confidence in her brother's voice.

"I do." Dawnpaw was shocked at how confident her own mew sounded.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you warrior names." Flowerstar looked down at them, Dawnpaw stared back, excitement rushing through her veins. "Turtlepaw, from this day forward you will be known as Turtleblaze, in honor of your father. SunClan honors your bravery and nobility." Dawnpaw stared at her brother, now named Turtleblaze as he stepped forward, licking Flowerstar's shoulder and as she touched her muzzle to his forehead. Turtleblaze stepped back beside Dawnpaw. "Dawnpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Dawnfire, to honor the fire in your spirit that no matter what, refuses to give out. SunClan honors your loyalty and courage." Dawnfire stepped forward, her new name filling her confidence and determination. She licked Flowerstar's shoulder, and let Flowerstar touch her muzzle to her forehead. "We welcome you as full warriors of SunClan!"

"Dawnfire! Turtleblaze! Dawnfire! Turtleblaze!" The cheers of the Clan surrounded the two brand new warriors, but there was one mew that stood out above the rest. She turned to look at Lionclaw, his amber eyes sparkling with pride.

"I'm so proud of you." Turtleblaze nuzzled Dawnfire. "And I know that our parents are too."

Dawnfire looked back at her brother. "I'm proud of you too." Her

voice shook, but she nuzzled her brother back overwhelmed with love and pride for him. Something behind him caught her eye, Dawnfire focused to see faint, shimmering outlines of three cats. Two warriors and a kit. Dawnfire's heart ached, but she looked in their eyes and saw pure love and pride. The image stuck in her mind even as they faded away.

"There's one more ceremony I must perform." Flowerstar announced, calling back the Clan's attention. Dawnfire suddenly realized what her becoming a warrior meant, Thornpelt would become deputy. "Blazeheart was our deputy, and while Snakewhisker has done well standing in as a temporary deputy, we need a new, permanent deputy. It pains that I've had to perform this ceremony so much lately." Flowerstar took a moment, but continued. "I say these words before the spirit of Blazeheart, so he may hear and approve my choice. Thornpelt will be the new deputy of SunClan!" Dawnfire felt her heart drop to her paws, she pressed against Turtleblaze.

"No cat could ever replace Blazeheart." Thornpelt spoke up, standing before Dawnfire and Turtleblaze. "But I promise I will serve this Clan the best I can."

"Thornpelt! Thornpelt!" The Clan cheered, but Dawnfire stayed silent. She looked away, staring at the ground. Flowerstar dismissed the meeting and Dawnfire straightened herself up.

"Congratulations!" Lionclaw came in, bounding around the two of them. His amber eyes were soft and caring. "I'm so happy for you."

"Thank you." Dawnfire purred. Turtleblaze let out a chuckle and brushed Dawnfire's pelt with his tail before padding over to Fawnheart.

"I like the name too," He purred, nudging her. "Now we can hunt together, go on patrols together and share a den together." He padded around her like an excited kit.

"I can't wait." Dawnfire purred, Lionclaw was right. She would get to spend much more time with now that she was a warrior.

"You have your vigil tonight, but I'll make sure you have a nest to sleep in when you're done." Lionclaw mewed. "It'll be next to mine."

Dawnfire's pelt burned, but she purred. "I'm looking forward to it." She was excited to sleep in the warrior's den with Lionclaw, but she wasn't excited for her vigil. She would have to sit all night in the cold.

Dawnfire looked over at Thornpelt who was speaking with Flowerstar, she felt uneasy about it but maybe now that Thornpelt was deputy he got what he wanted. Would he try to become leader? Or be content until his time came. Dawnfire flexed her claws, she refused to allow anything bad to happen to Flowerstar.

"We should celebrate with a piece of fresh-kill." Lionclaw mewed. Dawnfire looked back at the golden warrior, the mention of prey making her stomach growl. She hadn't eaten much at all since her parent's died, but Lionclaw was right.

"Alright." Dawnfire walked beside him over to the fresh-kill pile where he picked out a vole for them to share, they sat beside the drinking pool and began eating. Dawnfire noticed that Lionclaw was sitting closer to her than usual, she could feel his fur touching hers and the warmth radiating off of him. Dawnfire looked at her paws, feeling a rush of excitement, she enjoyed being this close to him, she felt safe.

Dawnfire spent the rest of day speaking with Lionclaw and other cats who congratulated her on her warrior name, but it was soon time for her vigil. She met with Turtleblaze in the center of camp. "Are you ready?" She asked, hoping she didn't sound too concerned with the sound of her mew.

Turtleblaze nodded. "It's gonna be a cold night, but we can do it." He sat down in the center of camp, just as the cats of SunClan were settling down for the night.

"Stay warm you two!" Lionclaw called over his shoulder before slipping into the warrior's den, Dawnfire stared after him. Soon, she would be in there as well. Dawnfire and Turtleblaze sat back to back, trying to stay warm together. The night fell silent and

Dawnfire looked up at the dark sky, as she did, snow began to fall slowly from the sky. She withheld a sigh, and closed her eyes, taking in the night.

She was a warrior now, after training for so long. She opened her eyes once more, Dawnfire was a warrior of SunClan, and she was going to be the best warrior she possibly be.

Chapter 16

Leaf-bare was bitter, noses were running more than prey in the SunClan forests and ear tips were stinging. Dawnfire trudged through the deep snow, shivering as she did so. She was part of a hunting patrol accompanied by Icepetal, Snowtail and Yarrowpaw. The other three had light fur as to not stand out against the white forest, Dawnfire however looked like dry blood against the powder. She glanced at Yarrowpaw who had clumps of snow in his long pale fur, Snowtail seemed to be experiencing the same problem.

Dawnfire looked across the forest, looking for any sign of prey. Her eyes landed upon tiny bird tracks, she sniffed the air but was only met with burning frost. She crouched low, trying to move as slowly as she possibly could. Then she saw it, a dark brown starlight searching for it's own food. Dawnfire graceful moved across the snow, her eyes set on her prey. With a slightly clumsy pounce, she caught the bird in her paws and gave a swift killing bite.

"Nice catch!" Icepetal purred, Dawnfire noticed that her voice sounded a bit dry.

"Thank you." Dawnfire purred and hid her catch to continue the hunt, she glanced at Icepetal who had streaming eyes. "Are you okay, Icepetal?" She questioned.

Snowtail heard the conversation and looked over, her deep blue eyes curious. "What's wrong?" She padded over to her sister.

"Yeah I'm fine." Icepetal purred. "Just a slight cough from the cold." She looked at the two she-cats and purred. "Let's keep hunting."

There wasn't much more have a hunt left, Snowtail managed to catch a small squirrel and Yarrowpaw a mouse. Icepetal almost caught another mouse but her coughing betrayed her. Snowtail told her to visit Poppyfur but Icepetal refused.

"Greencough could set in at any time." Snowtail had pointed out, her voice brisk with concern for her sister.

"If it gets worse I will go see her." Icepetal had argued, clearly not wanting to seem weak, that's how all cats were lately.

When they returned to camp Dawnfire noticed Willownose standing outside the medicine den, Dawnfire felt the hair on her spine raise up. Was Cloudkit okay? Was she okay? Dawnfire quickly moved towards the medicine den and peered inside. Cloudkit was looking up at Poppyfur as she sniffed his pelt. He turned his blue eyes onto her.

"Dawnfire!" He mewed excitedly. Poppyfur looked up as well, her eyes sparking with interest. Her gaze was odd to Dawnfire, but she brushed it off.

"What's going on?" Dawnfire asked, looking to Willownose, the she-cat seemed fine, her pelt was healthy and her eyes bright.

"Cloudkit was coughing last night and this morning, I wanting to get him checked out." Willownose replied, her eyes filled with the concern of a mother. Even though Cloudkit wasn't her own kit, Dawnfire could tell that Willownose had bonded with him.

"I told her I feel fine, my throat just hurts." Cloudkit mewed and looked at Pebblepaw. "Am I sick?" He questioned.

Pebblepaw, who was sorting through the herbs. "Ask Poppyfur, she's the one looking over you." She answered with a gentle tone in her voice.

"He doesn't seem sick," Poppyfur said. "Might just be a small cold, but there doesn't seem to be an infection of anys sort." Dawnfire's chest flooded with relief. The medicine cat turned to her apprentice. "What would you recommend for him?"

Pebblepaw was slightly taken off guard but recovered quickly. "It would be best to save our catmint, so tansy would be the good option; it prevents coughs."

Poppyfur nodded her head. "Correct, do we have any?" She asked.

Pebblepaw nodded and picked up a small yellow flower and moved over to her younger brother. Using her teeth, Pebblepaw tore off a very small piece. "Eat this." She mewed, pushing it towards him.

"Is it going to be gross?" Cloudkit asked, looking up at Pebblepaw with confusion and concern in his big blue eyes.

"Yes, but you have to take it." Pebblepaw replied. "It will make your cough go away."

"I don't want it if it's going to be gross!" Cloudkit stuck his nose in the air. Dawnfire let out a purr of amusement.

"Come on, Cloudkit. You need to take it." Willownose put in, trying to urge the kit to take it, and yet the kit still refused to eat it.

Dawnfire noticed Poppyfur looking at her, was she expecting her to do something? Could she do something about? Dawnfire stepped forward. "Cloudkit," she said gently. "Do you wanna get greencough?" She questioned.

Cloudkit shook his head. "No, but...herbs are gross." He pouted. "I don't want to eat them."

"Do you want to worry Willownose? Pebblepaw? Cinderpaw or Yarrowpaw? What about me?" Dawnfire said. "If you don't take the herbs we will worry about you, we want you to grow into a big strong warrior."

Cloudkit looked at the tansy, back at Dawnfire then swallowed the herb. As it touched his tongue he made a face. "Ew!' He growled, shaking his head.

"Let's get you back to the nursery so you can sleep that cough off." Willownose nudged Cloudkit out of the den.

"Thank you," Poppyfur said, turning to put away the rest of the tansy. "You were always good with kits."

Suddenly, Dawnfire felt a slight itch under her pelt. She had convinced Willowkit to eat the deathberries. She shoved away the thought and dipped her head. "No problem, I want that kit to be

healthy."

"Was there something you needed?" Poppyfur questioned, helping Pebblepaw clean up the herbs she had organized.

"Not really, I just wanted to see what was going on with Cloudkit." Dawnfire responded.

"You've taken an interest in him." Poppyfur replied, looking at Dawnfire with a curious glow in her eyes.

"I promised Dovetail I would." Dawnfire responded. "Why do you ask?"

"You want him to be your apprentice." Poppyfur turned to Pebblepaw. "Would you take the rest of that tansy to Hawktalon and Nightwing? Remember to not give them too much." Pebblepaw nodded and grabbed the herbs before gently padding out of the den.

"Is it bad that I want him as my apprentice? That's what Dovetail requested, I just want to keep my promise." Dawnfire said, slightly on edge. "What's wrong with wanting an apprentice."

"Nothing, but you are ambitious. In a good way of course, you want what's best for your Clan." Poppyfur's eyes were threatening to reveal something, something Dawnfire couldn't quite place.

"I want an apprentice yes, because I think it will be a good thing for me, and a good experience." Dawnfire answered, why did Poppyfur care so much about this?

"Do you want to be deputy someday?" Poppyfur questioned, narrowing her green eyes. Dawnfire felt unease, why was Poppyfur asking all of this? Why did she even care? Dawnfire hadn't really considered being deputy, not since she was a kit playing games with her littermates.

"I've never really thought about it." Dawnfire replied. "Why are you asking all of this?"

"If the chance came up, would you want to be a deputy? Maybe even leader?"

Dawnfire felt like she was on fire, these questions were making her paws twitch. Could she be leader? Since she became an apprentice it was never much of a concern. "I suppose so...I wouldn't argue."

Poppyfur let out a small sigh then turned looked Dawnfire in the eyes, eyes gentle and somehow rough at the same time. "The night you were born was the day of the half-moon, after your birth and I was sure that you and your mother were okay, I had to rush to the moonstone."

Dawnfire was slightly taken aback at this random change in conversation. "I was born on the half-moon?" She asked, wondering why it mattered.

Poppyfur nodded and continued. "Once there, I met with Honeywing. She gave me a prophecy." The medicine cat rested her eyes on Dawnfire.

"Why are you telling me this?" Dawnfire questioned.

"Because I believe that it is about you." Poppyfur replied. Her replied made Dawnfire confused, why would there be a prophecy about her? She was nothing special, but Honeywing would visit her in her dreams every so-often.

"Why do you even think that?" Dawnfire demanded.

"When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun." Poppyfur's voice dropped to a whisper. The way she spoke sent chills down Dawnfire's spine. "Your mother said she heard your name in a dream, from that moment I knew that this was your destiny."

Dawnfire shuffled her paws uncomfortably. "That's insane."

"No it's not." Poppyfur focused her eyes on Dawnfire, like she was looking through her almost. "Prophecies are nothing uncommon, and I believe this particular one is about you, Dawnfire. You have a destiny and a powerful one."

Dawnfire shook her head, refusing to believe the medicine cat. "You're crazy, there's no prophecy about me. I'm just a normal

warrior!" Dawnfire turned on her paws and began to storm out of the den, feeling a sense of uncertainty and panic rise in her chest. "Oh," she stopped for a moment. "Icepetal has a cough." She added before rushing out of the den.

Dawnfire wanted away from the medicine den, away from Poppyfur, away from camp even. She picked up her pawsteps and tried to get out before she was caught.

"What's the rush?" A voice stopped Dawnfire in her tracks, it was Lionclaw. His eyes were sparkling. Any other cat Dawnfire would shoved away and asked to be alone, but Lionclaw was different.

"I just want out of camp, away from other cats." She answered.

Lionclaw's eyes filled with concern. "Are you okay? Do you feel sick?" He questioned, his voice shaking slightly.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Dawnfire mewed. "I just wanna be in the forest, ya'know?" She looked at Lionclaw, wondering what he would say. The concern evaporated from his eyes and the happiness returned.

"I totally understand. " He purred. "I know you said you didn't want to be around cats but maybe....you could make an exception for me?" His eyes were so warm Dawnfire thought they would melt the snow around them.

"I would love to make an exception for you." Dawnfire purred, the thought of being with Lionclaw made her chest flutter.

Lionclaw's amber eyes glowed and the two cats walked out of camp, side by side. Once out of the camp, Lionclaw caught her eye, his sparkled with mischief.

"Race you!" Before Dawnfire even had a chance to respond or comprehend what he was doing, Lionclaw took off into the forest.

"Hey!' Dawnfire shouted and followed him, he paws pounding against the cold forest floor. She saw Lionclaw's golden pelt through the trees and she pursued it. She lept over a rock, landing smoothing on her paws. Her heart pounded in her chest, and her paws stung but she hadn't felt more alive in a long time. She neared

closer to Lionclaw till she was right beside him, he looked at her with a happy glow to his expression, she returned the look and they ran together. Dawnfire was surprised at how alive she felt beside him, their pelts brushing, their paws moving in perfect harmony like a breeze.

They stopped when they reached the river to the Gathering Hollow. Dawnfire's heart was racing, her blood pumping through her veins. Both hers and Lionclaw's breath billowed out in clouds before them. She felt warm, and when she looked at him she felt safe.

"You're faster than I thought." Lionclaw huffed.

"Never should've doubted me." Dawnfire teased playfully. "I'm a lot stronger than I look, you know."

"Oh I know." Lionclaw's voice changed, it was softer and gentler. "I've never doubted you." Lionclaw moved closer to her, Dawnfire could feel the heat of his fur.

Dawnfire's heart was racing, but it wasn't just from the run anymore. She met Lionclaw's amber gaze, and moved closer to him.

"You're the most amazing warrior in the forest." Lionclaw's voice was low, almost a whisper. Even though there were no other cats around to hear it.

"I'm really not." Dawnfire argued, her ears and pelt burning despite the cold wind.

"To me you are." Lionclaw's eyes burned with so many emotions that Dawnfire couldn't even name, she wanted to move closer to him; and she did. She moved close enough to him that she could hear his breathing, feel the warmth coming from his body and his warm, comforting scent. She felt safe, there was no threat of Thornpelt, no prophecy. Just her and him, together.

Dawnfire and Lionclaw stayed out for a while, walking together and talking together. She never wanted to go back to camp, but the sun was starting to set and it would be time for the gathering soon. As they made their way back to camp, Lionclaw nudged her playfully.

"Ready for your first gathering as a warrior?"
Dawnfire chuckled. "Is it any different from any other gathering?" She questioned, leaping over a small log.

"Well, your warrior name is gonna be announced and you'll be cheered for you. It's pretty exciting." Lionclaw responded.

"Pretty sure I did that when I was an apprentice, too." Dawnfire mewed. "It was awkward, I don't like being the center of attention."

"Well, being a warrior is different from being an apprentice." Lionclaw looked at her. "And I'll be there to soak up all the attention if you want me to." He held his chin high, eyes sparkling.

"Oh, how kind of you." She joked as they reached camp. The cats attending the Gathering were already joining around Flowerstar.

"I'm gonna go find Flamepaw, I'll meet up with you when we get to the hollow okay?" Lionclaw mewed. Dawnfire nodded and was shocked when Lionclaw touched his muzzle to hers, leaving her with a burning pelt and tingling heart.

"You ready?" Dawnfire turned to see Turtleblaze, his green eyes were steady but she couldn't help but see a sense of nerve in them. "Our first gathering as warriors." Dawnfire nodded.

"I think we'll be okay." She purred, then remembered it was also the gathering where Flowerstar would have to announce Windflight's and Blazeheart's deaths. She took a deep breath, watching the Clan as they started to leave. "Let's go." She fell in beside her brother as SunClan braved the cold walk to the gathering hollow.

They walked through the forest, making a quick pace so to keep warm and get there as soon as possible. Dawnfire noticed Lionclaw and Goldenleaf with their apprentices and Adderstrike not too far behind them with Heatherpaw. Dawnfire couldn't help but long for her own apprentice, but she had barely become a warrior. That wouldn't come for a long time, but perhaps when Cloudkit was ready...

Her mind flashed back to her earlier conversation with Poppyfur

about becoming leader and prophecies. *I just became a warrior.* Dawnfire twitched her tail. *Too soon to be thinking about becoming leader or even deputy, and that prophecy is nonsense.* She shook her head, refusing to believe the medicine cat.

SunClan arrived about the same time as MoonClan did, just behind LichenClan and AshClan. Flowerstar called out a greeting to Crowstar who in return greeted back. "How's the hunting, Flowerstar?" He questioned kindly. "Leaf-bare treating you alright?"

"Prey is running a little slow." Flowerstar replied. "But we're managing as always." Crowstar nodded and let out a small series of coughs. Dawnfire couldn't help but notice Shadowpelt looking uncomfortable next to him. Was Crowstar sick? "Everything alright?" Flowerstar questioned, her mew lined with worry.

"Yes." Crowstar replied, his voice dry. "Just a leaf-bare cough, nothing major." Dawnfire's ear twitched, that's the same thing Icepetal said. Flowerstar nodded, though most cats could see she didn't believe it.

"We should meet with the other leaders now." Flowerstar looked over her Clan then turned to Crowstar as them and their deputies padded over to the trees. Dawnfire looked around the group of AshClan cats, looking to see if Silverpaw was around. She wanted to tell her friend about becoming a warrior. Dawnfire stayed with her Clan as they sat down but she kept an eye out for Silverpaw.

"Dawnpaw?" A familiar voice questioned, Dawnfire turned to see Silverpaw, her blue eyes wide with excitement.

Dawnfire purred. "It's Dawn*fire* actually." She felt proud saying her warrior name.

"Wow! That's incredible. I also got my warrior name, you can call me Silvermoon!" The silver tabby held her head high.

"Congratulations!" Dawnfire touched her tail tip to Silvermoon's shoulder, her blue eyes glowed. Dawnfire felt happy to be with a friend.

"Silvermoon." A growl came, Dawnfire noticed Ashblaze pushing past cats to stand beside Silvermoon, his amber eyes casted a hate-filled gaze into Dawnfire's pelt.

"Calm down, Ashblaze." Silvermoon touched her muzzle to his cheek. "Dawnfire's a friend." Ashblaze didn't seem convinced, his eyes still burned like fire. Clearly he hadn't forgiven Dawnfire for shredding his ear.

Dawnfire felt warmth as Lionclaw stepped in beside her, taking on Ashblaze's stare. Dawnfire shook her head

"Is there a problem?" A familiar warmth surrounded Dawnfire as Lionclaw brushed up next to her. His amber eyes met Ashblaze's with the same amount of hate. The two warriors held a gaze sharp enough to cut grass, Dawnfire cast an awkward glance at Silvermoon who shook her head.

"No problem here." Silvermoon purred, nudging Ashblaze away from Dawnfire and Lionclaw. "Let's go find my brother, that gathering is going to start soon." Ashblaze snorted, but followed Silvermoon as they slipped back into the AshClan crowd.

"That cat needs to work on his glaring problem." Lionclaw twitched his tail, looking after Ashblaze and SIlvermoon.

Dawnfire laughed, brushing her tail along his flank. "So do you." She pushed Lionclaw lightly towards the group of SunClan cats and sat down beside Sandfoot and Rustpelt. Lionclaw didn't respond but he flicked his ears, she thought for a moment that she annoyed him but Lionclaw didn't seem like he was actually upset.

"Let's get this started before we all freeze to death." Lionstar spoke from the trees. Dawnfire could see his shivering even from where she sat. "I'd like to start if you all don't mind." None of the other leaders objected, so Lionstar stood up. "First of all, AshClan named two new warriors. Please welcome Silvermoon and Stormheart!"

The Clans cheered and Dawnfire took pride in cheering for her friend. She looked over at Silvermoon who was sitting with Ashblaze and a dark gray tom that Dawnfire assumed was her

brother, Stormheart."

"Flowerstar." Lionstar dipped his head to the SunClan leader. "You can go next." Flowerstar nodded respectfully and stood up as the golden tom sat down.

"SunClan has quite a bit of news to announce. First of all, SunClan unfortunately lost Blazeheart and Windflight due to a badger." Pain ripped through Dawnfire's heart at the mention of her parents, she dropped her head, feeling Lionclaw press against her. "However, we also welcome two new warriors; Dawnfire and Turtleblaze!" The sadness in the air was replaced with cheers, but Dawnfire kept her head ducked; not wanting to be the center of attention. "And Thornpelt is now SunClan's new deputy." There were more cheers, but Dawnfire had to stop herself from hissing.

Crowstar and Jaggedstar each announced their news, but Dawnfire was drowning in a flurry of emotions she didn't really pay attention until Flowerstar announced that it was time to leave. She stood up, walking by Lionclaw's side and looking at the cats of the Clans.

Thornpelt was a threat, but he wasn't the only one. Greencough was threatening the Clans and only StarClan knew what devastation would follow. Dawnfire tried to remain hopeful, but her heart and mind were clouded with fearful thoughts for the future.

Chapter 17

Coughing woke Dawnfire from her slumber. She opened her eyes to see that Sandfoot was upright and coughing. Applespots was also woken by her sister's coughing and pressed a nose to her pelt.

"You have a fever!" She exclaimed. "You need to see Poppyfur." Applespots voice was riddled with worry.

"What's going on...?" Lionclaw groaned from beside Dawnfire, he lifted his head, eyes groggy with sleep.

"Is it necessary to wake *every* cat before dawn?" Crowfur growled from her nest, lifted her head up.

"Sandfoot has a cough and a fever." Applespots explained franticly. "There's already an outbreak of whitecough in camp, you need to get checked."

"Applespots I'm fi--" Sandfoot's body quivered with a coughing fit, after it was over she just looked at Applespots and nodded, rising from her nest.

"Since every warrior is already awake..." Thornpelt growled, standing up. "The dawn patrol can start now. Crowfur, Applespots and Lionclaw, grab your apprentice and go patrol. Dawnfire I want you to organize a hunting patrol when they get back."

Dawnfire looked at Lionclaw who gave her a warm look, they exited the warriors den together. They said nothing, their gazes said it all. Lionclaw went to the back entrance for camp to get Flamepaw, and Dawnfire let out a sleepy yawn. Leaf-bare continued to grip the forest with icy claws, Dawnfire's eyes moved to Poppyfur's den where she heard coughing. Several cats had whitecough, Icepetal was the first case and not long after she was joined by Adderstrike, Rainears and Brackenpaw. Dawnfire silently thanked StarClan that Cloudkit had not gotten any worse.

Dawnfire sat outside the warriors den and rasped her tongue over her fur to warm herself up. Lionclaw returned with Flamepaw and looked at her gently before heading out with his patrol. It had been several days since their run in the forest and she felt closer to him. They slept beside each other in the warriors den and hunted and patrolled with each other whenever they could. They shared tongues and prey and Dawnfire couldn't be happier.

Behind her, Turtleblaze pushed his way out of the warriors den and stretched. Dawnfire got her brother's attention.

"Want to go hunting?" She questioned. She hadn't been able to spend much time with him since their warrior ceremony, it would be nice to go hunting together.

"Sure," He yawned. "Sounds fun." He padded forward and Fawnheart followed him, Dawnfire shoved back her previous irritation for Fawnheart, she didn't seem to be as bad as she was when she was an apprentice. Still bitter and rude at times, but she wasn't always picking fights. While the dawn patrol was gone Dawnfire managed to get Squirreltail, Heatherpaw, and Goldenleaf to join her. The dawn patrol returned and they looked slightly concerned.

Dawnfire padded up to Lionclaw and looked at him curiously. "What's wrong? Did the patrol go alright?"

"Sort of." Lionclaw looked uncertain and slightly annoyed. "We found AshClan scents inside the border."

"Oh?" Dawnfire's claws itched at the ground. What would AshClan be doing inside of their border.

Lionclaw nodded. "I'm going to report it to Flowerstar now."

"Okay," Dawnfire dipped her head, and was slightly surprised when Lionclaw brushed his muzzle against her cheek, but it left her heart racing.

"You ready?" There was a pleased purr behind her, Dawnfire turned to see Goldenleaf, her eyes sparkling.

Dawnfire's ears burned. "Yes, let's go." She gathered her patrol and led them out of camp, as they walked, Goldenleaf fell in beside her

"I think it's sweet." Goldenleaf said quietly, her voice as soft as honey.

"What are you talking about?" Dawnfire looked at her curiously, but she had a feeling she knew what this was about.

"You and my brother." She said, with a slight ring to her mew.

"What are you talking about?" Dawnfire's ears burned, she avoided Goldenleaf's green gaze.

"Oh, shut up." Goldenleaf laughed. "The entire Clan knows about you two act around each other. You look at each other with such love in your eyes."

Love? The word rang in Dawnfire's ears. Did Lionclaw love her? Did she love Lionclaw? The thought made her heart soar.

"Well...I guess..." Dawnfire stuttered over her words. "Is it a bad thing?"

"Of course not!" Goldenleaf purred. "Like I said, I think it's sweet. I love my brother." Her eyes softened, and turned somewhat sad. "After our father died he became so serious about his duties, not even I could get to him. There was only one cat who made his eyes shine like the sun." Goldenleaf looked Dawnfire in the eyes. "And that was you."

Dawnfire's heart skipped several beats, she felt like she could run around the forest three times. "He's an amazing cat..." The words stayed in the air as the patrol began their hunt. Dawnfire's mind was distracted though, Goldenleaf thought it was sweet, but what about Turtleblaze? She knew that he wasn't fond of Lionclaw, it caused many fights when they were apprentices. She would have to talk with him about it.

The hunting went somewhat unsuccessful, the only prey caught was a skinny mouse by Heatherpaw and a small bird by Goldenleaf. As they returned to camp with their weak catch, Dawnfire stood beside

Turtleblaze.

"Can I talk to you?" She asked, slightly afraid at what he might say.

"Of course." Turtleblaze seemed off, his mind wasn't with him right now. Dawnfire was worried about him.

"I'm sure you know about me and Lionclaw...right?" Her voice cracked slightly, she couldn't handle the emotion that Lionclaw gave her.

"Yeah." Turtleblaze's voice was curt, she tried not to be hurt by it. "What about it?"

"What do you think?" She questioned. Turtleblaze suddenly stopped walking, he gave Dawnfire a questioning look.

"What do you mean?" He questioned.

"What do you think of it? I know you don't really like Lionclaw but--"

Turtleblaze touched his tail to her mouth to silence her. "Stop, Dawnfire." He mewed, he didn't sound angry, she couldn't place his emotion. "Lionclaw isn't my favorite warrior, no, he's arrogant and full of himself but," He stopped talking for a moment. "But, he makes you happy."

"What?"Dawnfire questioned, looking at her brother with confusion.

"When you're with him, you're eyes are brighter. You sit up straighter, you walk a little prouder and you hunt a little better. After our parents died," Turtleblaze's voice cracked. "I was worried about you, I was scared you wouldn't be able to pick yourself up, but I see you with him, I see you so happy and it makes me happy. It doesn't matter what I think of him, it matters what you think of him and what he thinks of you."

Dawnfire felt a purr growing in her chest. "That means a lot to me," She said, but then she stopped. Was he happy? "But," She added. "Are *you* happy? We haven't been spending enough time together."

Turtleblaze let out a small laugh. "You have Lionclaw," He said. "And I have a certain cat in my life who makes me happy." His eyes turned to a gentle glow. "But, I'm afraid you don't like her very much."

Dawnfire let out a *mrrow* of amusement. "She's a bit hot headed and arrogant as well...but if she makes you happy then I suppose I can live with her."

Turtleblaze purred and touched his muzzle to hers. "Thank you, Dawnfire." He murmured, his voice full of love.

"You're welcome." Dawnfire licked her brother's shoulder and they moved forward. The cold weather bit at her pelt but her heart glowed with warmth.

Dawnfire padded through the forest, her eyes moving to Bramblepelt every so often as he lead the patrol to the AshClan border. Snowtail and Yarrowpaw were also part of the patrol. AshClan continued testing the border and Flowerstar ordered bigger patrols in case they decided to start trouble. As they neared the border, Dawnfire could already smell AshClan. It seemed a lot stronger than just border crossings.

"Be careful." Bramblepelt warned. "The scent is much stronger than usual." He said and the patrol moved closer together. They neared the border and Dawnfire could make out the shadows of several cats. The closer they got the more she could see the cats, at the front was Echoheart and with her was Riverstorm, Graypelt, Mudthorn, Ashblaze, Featherfall, Harewhisker, Foxfeather and Ratpelt.

"What are you doing here, Echoheart." Bramblepelt demanded. "Why has AshClan been crossing the border?"

"I'm glad you came, Bramblepelt." Dawnfire remembered Echoheart's arrogant tone all too well from when AshClan attacked the SunClan apprentices.

"Echoheart," Riverstorm stepped forward. "I will talk to him." The blue she-cat faced Bramblepelt head on. "We need herbs, catmint

especially."

"What makes you think we have herbs?" Bramblepelt questioned. "Why do you need them?"

"Why do you think, mouse-brain?" Echoheart hissed, only to be silenced by Riverstorm.

"AshClan is suffering from Greencough and we need the herbs. We've already lost a warrior and two apprentices." Riverstorm explained, her voice sounding strained and sad.

"I'm sorry to hear that but SunClan has no herbs to spare." Bramblepelt dipped his head. "Leaf-bare is harsh, but we must survive."

"I'm sorry, Bramblepelt but AshClan needs the herbs..." Riverstorm's voice cracked slightly, growing lower into a growl. "Has SunClan lost any cats?"

"No, but we do have sick ones." Bramblepelt replied, he looked over his shoulder at the patrol nervously.

"We need the herbs more." Riverstorm growled. "And if you do not willingly give them to us...we will take them by force." Riverstorm unsheathed her claws, digging them into the snow.

Bramblepelt's fur stood up against his spine, Dawnfire unsheathed her own claws, the AshClan patrol did the same. "Yarrowpaw..." He muttered under his breath. "Go to camp, get back up. We're going to have a fight on our paws." Yarrowpaw dipped his head and dashed off through the forest. Bramblepelt lifted his head and faced Riverstorm. "We will not give up our herbs to you," His voice was dangerous.

"Very well..." Riverstorm dipped her head. "AshClan, attack!" The battle patrol suddenly overtook the small border patrol. Dawnfire was instantly shoved to the ground by Harewhisker. She felt razor sharp claws dig into her pelt, Dawnfire let out a cry of pain and dug her teeth into the she-cat's shoulder. Dawnfire felt more claws rake down her back and let go of Harewhisker, she turned to see

Featherfall ready to fight as well. Dawnfire twisted on her hind paws and slashed at Featherfall, her claws catching his chest.

Please hurry, Yarrowpaw! Dawnfire prayed to StarClan, slashing more at the silver-tom. Teeth gripped her tail and Featherfall slashed at her muzzle. Dawnfire missed his claws and kicked her hind foot backwards to release Harewhisker's grip on her tail. While Dawnfire was turned, Featherfall took her to the ground, sinking his teeth into her shoulder. Dawnfire let out a cry of pain until Featherfall was forcibly taken off of her. Turtleblaze stood above her, amber eyes blazing with fury. He lept onto Featherfall and the the toms tumbled away.

SunClan warriors swarmed over the AshClan patrol, evening the odds. Applespots lept onto Harewhisker, and started slashing at her, the small warrior ducked and ran away. To Dawnfire's left, Crowfur tussled with Foxfeather and Cinderpaw was teaming with Yarrowpaw to fight Ratpelt. There was a hiss in Dawnfire's ears and she was shoved to the side. Dawnfire scrambled to her paws to face Echoheart, the gray she-cat had fury in her eyes.

"Last time we met you were just a kit." She spat, voice filled with malice.

"And you're still a coward!" Dawnfire hissed and tackled Echoheart, digging her claws into the she-cat's flank. Echoheart hissed and drug her claws down Dawnfire's hind leg. Echoheart twisted underneath Dawnfire's paws and caused her to fall hard on the cold ground. Before Dawnfire could get to her paws she felt teeth in the scruff of her neck. Dawnfire struggled as Echoheart dragged her across the floor before giving a mighty heave. Dawnfire rolled through the snow, only stopping when her head crashed against a rock.

Pain shot through her skull, and when she opened her eyes the world around her was blurry. Dawnfire couldn't focus on a single thing, she heard Echoheart's pawsteps and a small chuckle from the she-cat. Dawnfire narrowed her eyes and could see the silver blurred figure of Echoheart. There was a loud crash of bushes and another figure stepped into view, this one was golden.

"Remember me?" The voice was low, full of hatred and anger. Dawnfire knew it was Lionclaw, she could never mistake him.

"Oh the brave little warrior who crossed my border." Echoheart sneered. "I wasn't scared of you then and I'm not scared of you now."

"You kill my mother and now..." Lionclaw growled. "You try to kill her?"

"Oh, did I upset you?" Echoheart didn't have a chance to say anything more because Lionclaw jumped onto her, the two figures fell into the snow and all Dawnfire could see was the two figures clawing at each other.

Lionclaw shoved her to the ground and slashed his forepaw, Dawnfire saw a splash of crimson. Echoheart rose to her paws and attacked forward at Lionclaw, his golden figure began bloodied. Dawnfire tried to stand up and help but her body screamed at her to stay down. The two recoiled and landed in the snow. Lionclaw let out a terrifying hiss and reached forward, Echoheart yowled in pain and her blood splattered the white snow in front of Dawnfire.

Echoheart snarled but did not attack back, Dawnfire noticed another figure that was bluish-gray. Riverstorm, she assumed. The she-cat let out a gasp then yelled: "AshClan retreat! It's not worth it, retreat!" In a heartbeat the AshClan cats were back in their own territory. Lionclaw turned and leaned over Dawnfire.

"Are you okay?" He questioned, concern filled his voice. Dawnfire tried to respond but the pain was too much, she closed her eyes and gave to blackness.

Dawnfire's memory was fuzzy, she remembered the battle and had a few spotty memories of walking back to camp but she awoke in the warrior's den. The scent of herbs was heavy in the air, she lifted her head and tried to focus on the sunlight. The pain was mostly gone, with the exception of a dull ache in the back of her head. She rose shakily to her paws then exited the den. Lionclaw spotted her and ran over to her, he had cobwebs over his hindleg.

"Are you okay?" He questioned. "How do you feel? How is your head?" Lionclaw sniffed over her pelt.

"I'm fine, Lionclaw." She said, trying to stop the fretting tom. "I don't hurt or anything. Why was I in the warriors den and not the medicine cat den?"

"Poppyfur didn't want you to get sick, Icecloud has greencough." His voice was sad. Dawnfire looked towards the the medicine den. They had greencough in the camp now, dread filled her belly.

"Don't worry," Lionclaw touched his nose to her shoulder. "You're okay, and the Clan will be okay too. I promise."

Dawnfire prayed to StarClan that she could truly believe his promise.

Chapter 18

Coughing was the only thing heard in the nearly empty camp, Dawnfire had just returned from a border patrol and all other cats were out in the forest to avoid catching greencough. Poppyfur's den was full of sick cats. Icepetal was the worst, the white she-cat was gaunt and almost looked like a ghost. Adderstrike, Brackenpaw and Rainears had all gotten worse too. They weren't alone anymore either, Heatherpaw, Sandfoot, Rustfur, Redclaw and and Stormwind. Cloudkit was coughing again as well, but Willownose kept him confined to the nursery. The sickness was getting worse, if SunClan didn't find catmint soon, cats would die.

The bracken rustled behind Dawnfire and in stepped Cinderpaw and Yarrowpaw followed by their mentors. Cinderpaw's chest was puffed out and her eyes glowed with pride, Yarrowpaw was slightly more humbled but also looked much more excited.

"What's going on?" Dawnfire questioned.

"You're looking at the next two warriors of SunClan, we just had our final assessment and we both did great." Cinderpaw boasted, Dawnfire didn't think she had seen a more excited apprentice. She let out a purr of amusement. "That's wonderful, I'm happy for you too."

"I just wish the camp wasn't so..." Yarrowpaw's eyes were soft. "Sad."

"Don't worry about it," Dawnfire mewed. "A change of pace will make cats happy." She purred as Snowtail and Crowfur went to Flowerstar's den. After a few heart aching moments for the two apprentices, the leader exited her den. Dawnfire realized with a sense of alarm that Flowerstar was looking thinner, her coat was pale and her eyes dull. Fear spread through Dawnfire's body. Was the SunClan leader sick?

Flowerstar climbed the SunTree, each paw step shakier than the

last. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather before the SunTree for a Clan meeting." Flowerstar's voice didn't carry through the hollow like it normally did, it was raspy and dry. From the medicine cat den, Poppyfur poked her head out, her eyes dark with exhaustion as well as worry for the leader. "A few days ago, AshClan attempted to steal our herbs only to fail. Two apprentices fought bravely in the battle and one of them made it quickly to the camp to retrieve help then went straight back into the battle, and today they had their final assessment." Despite how raspy her tone was, Flowerstar still spoke proudly. "Crowfur, how did Cinderpaw's assessment go?"

Crowfur stood up. "Wonderful, Flowerstar. Cinderpaw hasn't been my apprentice for long, but she's done nothing but impress me. While hunting she caught two squirrels and took great charge in her team hunt with Squirreltail." Cinderpaw puffed out her chest again.

"And you, Snowtail? How has Yarrowpaw been?" Flowerstar questioned the white she-cat.

"Just as wonderful, when I first took on Yarrowpaw he was skittish and quiet, but now he is fierce, loyal and extremely intelligent. While hunting he caught two mice, and was a little hesitant when hunting with Fawnheart but his tracking skills proved to be exemplary." Snowtail's eyes glowed with pride as she talked about her apprentice, Yarrowpaw ducked slightly from the attention, his tail curly around his paws.

Flowerstar jumped down from the SunTree, landing slightly uneasily but stood up straight quickly. "Then today, I am proud to make you two warriors." Her voice was bold again. "Cinderpaw and Yarrowpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Cinderpaw's voice was steady and fierce. No cat could deny it.

"I do." Yarrowpaw's voice shook slightly, he was smaller than the average warrior. Rowanpaw was almost bigger than him, but his eyes glowed with strength and bravery.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names. Cinderpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Cinderflame. SunClan honors your bravery and strength." Flowerstar leaned forward and touched her nose to Cinderflame's forehead and the new warrior licked her shoulder in return. The silver leader turned to Yarrowpaw. "Yarrowpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Yarrowtail, SunClan honors your intelligence and courage." Newly named Yarrowtail repeated the ritual with Flowerstar. "We welcomes you both as full warriors of SunClan!"

"Cinderflame! Yarrowtail! Cinderflame! Yarrowtail!" The Clan chanted, Dawnfire felt a deep purr in her throat and went up to her friends. "Congratulations!" Dawnfire purred, touching her nose to Cinderflame's shoulder and again to Yarrowtail's. "

How does it feel?" Pebblepaw asked, joining them. Dawnfire looked at the young medicine cat apprentice, did she envy her littermates? Dawnfire shook her head, Pebblepaw seemed happy as a medicine cat.

"Amazing!" Cinderflame exclaimed, stretching her claws. The two became apprentices a moon or so after Dawnfire, but her apprenticeship was abnormally long.

"Have fun with your vigil!" Turtleblaze mewed as he padded up to them. "Leaf-bare vigils are hard, we nearly froze to death!" Yarrowtail's eyes flashed with concern.

Dawnfire nudged her brother. "Don't scare them," She teased. "It's not that bad, and you have each other to keep warm." That seemed to settle Yarrowtail.

A heavy fit of coughing made Dawnfire and the others jump, she turned to see Flowerstar heaved over coughing hard. Poppyfur ran from her den to the leader's side, the medicine cat sniffed Flowerstar, her green eyes filling with fear. "Pebblepaw!" She cried, the white and silver apprentice quickly broke away and ran over to her mentor. They exchanged a few words and Pebblepaw dashed over to the medicine den.

"Is she alright?" Thornpelt demanded of Poppyfur, his claws digging into the soil. "What's wrong with her?"

Dawnfire couldn't hear her but it looked like she spoke the words "greencough." The Clan watched helplessly as Poppyfur slowly moved Flowerstar to her own den. After a few moments Pebblestep came out with Heatherpaw leaning heavily against her side. The small apprentice looked like a frame of a cat, Dawnfire could see her ribs through her ginger pelt. Poppyfur ran back to the den and was guiding out Icepetal, Dawnfire was horrified by the she-cat's appearance. Icepetal's fur was clinging to her bones like wet moss, she looked like the cat form of death.

"Icepetal!" Snowtail cried as she saw her sister, Dawnfire saw Flamepaw cowering at the sight of her own sister.

"What are you doing?" Snowtail questioned Pebblepaw as Poppyfur laid Icepetal in the leader's den.

"Those three are the worst, we need them in a separate den so the other's can recover." Pebblepaw raised her voice. "No cat is to enter the medicine cat den unless it's an absolute emergency. Flowerstar, Icepetal and Heatherpaw will be sleeping in the SunTree so the lesser affected cats can recover easily.

"Will Heatherpaw be okay?" Flamepaw squeaked, the she-cat clearly terrified about her sister.

"Time will tell, Flamepaw." Pebblepaw's voice was soft as feathers. "Brackepaw isn't as bad but could always take a turn." She touched her muzzle to Flamepaw's. "Pray to StarClan that they will survive this."

Flamepaw nodded, the she-cat looked terrified, but somewhat calmed down. Unease grew in Dawnfire's body like a wild thicket, SunClan was on the edge of something terrible. No catmint was growing in the territory right now, and cats were growing sicker. Dawnfire choked down her nerves and let out a prayer to StarClan for help.

Dawnfire's sleep was uneasy, even with Lionclaw at her side she

was cold and nervous. Their leader was ill, what would they do if Flowerstar didn't make it? Dawnfire had no idea how many lived the SunClan leader had left. Would Thornpelt be leader? What if all the sick cats died? The air began to choke Dawnfire, her body twitched in her sleep.

Dawnfire! Dawnfire heard her name, and wondered if it was real or not. Then she felt something prod her and she jumped up. Lionclaw let out a groan but didn't wake. Dawnfire raised her head and saw the silhouette of a cat. After her eyes focused for a moment she realized it was Pebblepaw. The medicine cat motioned for Dawnfire to follow her and she did, she was met by the fierce cold of the night.

"What's going on?" Dawnfire questioned, stifling a yawn. The she-cat's blue eyes burned with fear and excitement.

"I had a dream." Pebblepaw said. "About catmint."

Dawnfire was instantly on alert. "Where is it? Can you go get it?"

"That's just it," Pebblepaw mewed, her voice low. "All I saw was a huge patch of catmint, there were some other flowers as well. They were surrounded by some weird barrier and I think there were twoleg nests."

"The twolegplace..." Dawnfire muttered. Suddenly remembering her mother's story of the black liquid accident. It was along a thunderpath, and pass the thunderpath was a twolegplace. A place that no forest cat ever went.

"Do you know where it is?" Pebblepaw asked, sounded increasingly more eager.

"I think so...but it's dangerous for you to go alone." SunClan didn't need their noseblind medicine cat wandering about a twolegplace.

"Can you come with me?" Pebblepaw asked suddenly. "Please, Dawnfire." Her voice cracked. "I can't stand by and watch my Clanmates die anymore..."

Dawnfire felt a pang of sympathy for the small cat, it couldn't be

easy being a medicine cat. Must be even harder to be a medicine cat and lose a patient. Dawnfire recalled Willowkit's death, the look of sorrow in Poppyfur's eyes. "Okay, I'll go with you."

"We need to go now, I'm afraid Icecloud won't live much longer if we don't." Pebblepaw cast a sad look at the SunTree.

Dawnfire didn't like the thought of running about at night in the cold, but the twolegplace would be nearly empty if they went now. "Alright, let's go." The two made a quick pace out of camp, only stopping near Yarrowtail and Cinderflame who sat their vigil.

"I have to do medicine cat things, and Dawnfire is coming with me." Pebblepaw told her siblings quickly, they nodded and the two were off. They moved on swift paws through the cold forest, Dawnfire prayed to StarClan that she knew where she was going.

"We will have to go towards Jagged Rocks, there will be a thunderpath there." Dawnfire mewed as they rushed passed the Moss Hollow.

"What's a thunderpath?" Pebblepaw asked. Dawnfire realised that not many cats might know what a twolegplace or thunderpath were, Dawnfire only knew because of Windflight's story.

"It's a long, black stone path that smells terrible. Long ago, when my mother was an apprentice a giant beast known as a monster ran past and covered her patrol in a mysterious black, hot liquid. It got in Hawktalon's eyes and that's how he lost his sight." Dawnfire explained, she could see Pebblepaw tense, her eyes filled with fear."If there's no monsters, we should be able to cross pretty easily. It's like a river." Dawnfire said, trying to calm the she-cat.

Jagged Rocks came into the view, their grey surface white from the snow. This was normally a decent spot for catmint but all had been killed by the cold. The two SunClan cats kept crossing SunClan territory, Dawnfire realized she underestimated the distance. Dawnfire was cold and her paws burned from the snow. However, a very strong stench filled her nose causing her to snort.

"What is it?" Pebblepaw questioned, looked at her with curious

eyes.

"I think we're nearing the thunderpath." Dawnfire replied and kept walking. The scent of SunClan grew stale until it was almost gone completely. This forest was unfamiliar, they were no longer in SunClan territory but unmarked territory. The approached a very tall barrier, it looked like a hard, silver web. The edges were white with frost.

"What is it?" Pebblepaw asked, looking uneasily at the barrier.

"I'm not sure," Dawnfire replied, looking along the length of the barrier. "But we need to get through if we want to go through the twolegplace." Dawnfire sniffed along it, looking for a weak spot. She unsheathed her claws and attempted to claw through it but it was strong.

"Over here!" Dawnfire looked up and saw that Pebblepaw had moved along a little farther down the barrier and was motioning to a medium sized hole. Dawnfire padded over quickly and inspected it, the edge of the web looked sharp, but not deadly.

"Okay, I'll go through first." Dawnfire flattened herself against the cold floor, wincing as the frost touched her belly. She pulled herself under the fence, the web dug into her skin. Dawnfire clenched her teeth and pushed through, she felt the hard substance rake against her pelt but she made it through. When she looked back over, tufts of her golden-brown fur remained. Pebblepaw was smaller, she would have an easier time. Dawnfire looked around, looking for any danger. All she saw was a giant, slick dark surface that reeked of crowfood and death. "Okay, it's safe." Dawnfire urged the she-cat through.

Pebblepaw crouched down and pushed herself through in a much easier way. Once across she nodded and they approached the thunderpath. It looked like a black river of death, Dawnfire wasn't sure if it was safe. She touched a tentative white paw to the surface, it was rough and cold. She waited for several moments and nothing happened. Taking a deep breath, she turned to Pebblepaw. "Okay, I think it's safe. We run together and we run fast understand?" She questioned.

The young medicine cat trembled but nodded, her blue eyes determined. Dawnfire positioned herself at the edge of the thunderpath. "Alright..." She muttered. "Go!" At her call both Dawnfire and Pebblepaw sprinted across the surface, it was rough against Dawnfire's pads but she didn't stop for even a second. They reached the other side safely together, both panting heavily. Dawnfire looked up and saw many rows of twolegnests, more than she could count.

Pebblepaw's eyes looked over each and every single one. "There!" She suddenly shouted and took off running.

"Pebblepaw, wait!" Dawnfire ran after her, heart pounding in her chest. StarClan knew what horrors and dangers lie in this twolegplace?

Pebblepaw stood before another barrier, this one made of lightly colored wood. It surrounded a large area covered in snow. Her ears and tails drooped, her eyes were sad. "I could've swore....this was it." Her voice was filled with sadness.

Dawnfire felt a pang of sympathy, then a smell came to her nose. Her ears twitched and she moved closer to the barrier, the scent got stronger. It made her mouth water, and her paws twitch. *Catmint!* Dawnfire ducked under the barrier and used her paw to clear away a small section of snow. Underneath was the green, leafy plant, alive and well. "Pebblepaw!" She shouted, the medicine cat perked up and moved over to Dawnfire. Once she saw the herb her jaws dropped and her eyes widened.

"Oh thank StarClan!" She shouted. "How much is there?" Pebblepaw began gently clearly the snow, Dawnfire joined her. They were extremely careful as to not destroy any of the precious herb. They uncleared a rather large section before they got to other plants. "Grab as much as you can!" Pebblepaw said and began gathering the herb.

Dawnfire leaned down and carefully took the plant in her jaws, it tasted so good but she wouldn't dare waste it on her. Icepetal and Flowerstar needed it! Dawnfire collected catmint till her jaws ached and threatened to drop it. Pebblepaw also had a giant bundle, they

had taken most of the herb that was there. Pebblepaw motioned that it was okay to leave.

They exited the garden and moved quickly towards the thunderpath, it would be harder to cross with a mouthful of catmint but they did it anyway. Dawnfire was nervous about the barrier, she had a hard time getting through before, but now she had herbs. The journey back through wasn't as bad, but she lost two leaves. Pebblepaw dismissed and they began rushing back to camp.

By the time they reached the SunClan camp the sun was beginning to rise, they stepped into camp and the first cat to see them was Yarrowtail whose eyes widened when he saw the herbs. Pebblepaw pushed past her siblings and headed towards the medicine cat den but stopped when she heard Poppyfur shout her name from the SunTree. The tone in her voice made something seem very, very wrong. Pebblepaw ran to the SunTree and Dawnfire quickly followed, they neared the entry and Dawnfire could just barely make out the figures of Poppyfur and Flowerstar. The SunClan leader wasn't moving.

"Dawnfire stay out!" Poppyfur shouted, then turned to the two cats, her green eyes wide. "Is that...is that catmint?" She ran up to her apprentice. "Where in the name of StarClan did you find this--it doesn't matter." Poppyfur shook her head. "Flowerstar is losing a life."

Dawnfire felt her belly drop to her paws, Flowerstar was dying? Dawnfire narrowed her eyes to focus on Flowerstar, she was weak and skinny and not breathing. After a few moments, her body jerked and she let out a cough.

"It's okay, Flowerstar." Poppyfur mewed softly. "We have catmint now." Poppyfur beckoned Pebblepaw forward and they gently fed the leader the herb. "I will give this to Icecloud and Heatherpaw as well, you and Dawnfire go to the medicine cat den and treat the others."

Pebblepaw set down her herbs and dipped her head, turning from the den. She was sad again, her eyes dull. They hurried to the medicine cat den where Dawnfire could finally set down her bundle

of catmint. "You're going to save a lot of lives, Pebblepaw." She mewed, trying to lift her spirits.

"Yes, but I couldn't save the life Flowerstar lost." She said sadly, taking out doses of catmint for the cats in the den.

"But more cats will be alive because of it, Flowerstar was given nine lives for a reason. We still have our leader, if it had been Icepetal or Heatherpaw they would be gone to StarClan forever."

"I suppose." Pebblepaw said as she gave herbs to Brackenpaw. Dawnfire helped until every cat had been given catmint, they even had some left over. Not long after, Poppyfur returned to the den with her own bundle of extra herbs.

"Where did you find the herbs? Was it you?" She turned to Dawnfire, eyes full of so much emotion.

"No, it was Pebblepaw. I just helped her find it and gather it." Dawnfire motioned to the apprentice who still looked sad, but she turned to her mentor.

"I had a dream of a twoleg nest filled with catmint, Dawnfire took me to the twolegplace to get it and we brought it back." She sighed. "But it was too late for Flowerstar."

"Are you a mouse-brain?" Poppyfur demanded, taking both Dawnfire and Pebblepaw off guard. "You've saved half the Clan!" She touched a nose to her apprentice. "Because of you Pebblepaw, SunClan gets to live, had you not found it Flowerstar could've lost more than just one life! You saved SunClan!"

Chapter 19

The cats of the forest were no longer cold, the forest was wet with the thaw of leaf-bare and cats welcomed new-leaf. Dawnfire especially loved the warmer weather, it was much easier to hunt and everything in the forest was new. The moon was high in the sky and SunClan was on it's way to the gathering. This was the first gathering since Dawnfire's warrior ceremony and a lot had happened. SunClan was recovering, the weakest cats were Icepetal and Flowerstar but she still led her Clan to the Gathering Hollow.

SunClan was the second Clan to arrive after LichenClan, Flowerstar nodded a greeting to Jaggedstar as MoonClan entered the Hollow. Dawnfire noticed that Crowstar was not leading the Clan, instead Shadowpelt was, he had Tawnytail by his side.

"Flowerstar. Jaggedstar." He greeted the two leaders, dipping his head.

"Where is Crowstar?" Jaggedstar questioned, eyes filled with concern.

"In StarClan I'm afraid." Shadowpelt, or Shadowstar Dawnfire assumed, replied. "We lost him early this moon."

"It saddens me to hear that." Flowerstar dipped her head respectfully. "He was a wonderful leader."

"He was," Shadowstar mewed, then turned his head when AshClan entered. Riverstorm was at the lead. Did Lionstar die too? Unease pricked Dawnfire's pelt.

"We should get this gathering started." Thornpelt said. "Now that AshClan is finally here." Dawnfire noticed how small the AshClan patrol was, only a few cats were here. Dawnfire caught Echoheart's gaze, the she-cat had scars across her face, they must've been from Lionclaw.

"If it's alright," Riverstorm mewed once the leaders settled in. "I would like to go first." The other leaders nodded and the blue-gray she-cat stood up. "You may be wondering why Lionstar isn't here, he's not dead, just too weak to travel. We had an outbreak of greencough in AshClan and lost Hawkpaw, Larkpaw and Leafwind." The Clans, even SunClan, shared a moment of silence for the three lost cats. "However," Riverstorm's voice sharpened. "AshClan remains strong and we are recovering well from the loss."

"Clearly, if Lionstar couldn't show up." Dawnfire heard Rockfur mutter to Rustpelt who shared a small laugh. Bramblepelt hissed at them to be quiet.

"That is all, AshClan has to report." Riverstorm dipped her head and sat down.

"If the other Clans don't mind, I would like to go next." Flowerstar mewed, standing up when she got their approval. "SunClan also had an outbreak of greencough, but fortunately we lost no cats to the sickness." Dawnfire realized she has hiding the fact that she lost a life, probably something she wouldn't want to reveal. "We had no herbs to begin with, but thanks to our medicine cat apprentice, Pebblepaw, we found an abundance."

"Pebblepaw! Pebblepaw!" SunClan shouted loudly, the small she-cat licked her chest shyly.

"We also recently named two more warriors, Yarrowtail and Cinderflame!" The Clans cheered once again, Dawnfire felt her unease be replaced with pride. SunClan was stronger than ever, with warriors and apprentices filling the Clan. "That is all that SunClan has to report." Flowerstar nodded to Shadowstar.

The new MoonClan leader stood up. "As you may know, Crowstar has joined StarClan and we lost our deputy earlier this moon. I am proud to take on the role as MoonClan's leader. My deputy is Tawnytail." The Clans mourned the loss of Crowstar but welcomed Shadowstar and Tawnytail. "We also have two new warriors, Bonefur and Icepool!" The Clans cheered yet again.

After Shadowstar sat down, Jaggedstar rose. "LichenClan had a

harsh leaf-bare, but we did not lose any cats. In fact, we welcome new life as Flamewhisker recently kitted Foxkit and Rosekit." His voice purred as he mentioned new kits. New kits were always a good sign for Clan life.

"I believe that concludes this Gathering." Riverstorm mewed, the three leaders nodded and jumped down.

Lionclaw and Dawnfire were approached by a tom that Dawnfire remembered as Swiftpaw, or Swiftheart now.

"Hey," Lionclaw laughed. "Haven't seen you in a while." He stood up to greet his old friend. "This is Dawnfire, I don't know if you've met." Lionclaw introduced, his voice growing soft. Dawnfire's pelt heated up.

"We met once when you both were apprentices. " Dawnfire mewed politely. She was glad to see that Lionclaw still had a friend in Swiftheart.

"I think you know my cousin," Swiftheart said, motioning his head towards a cat Dawnfire remembered to be Violetfur.

Dawnfire nodded. "I've spoken with her a few times." She replied, Violetfur was conversing with Shadowstar and Tawnytail.

"She wants to be leader someday, and she will, I can see it her eyes." Swiftheart purred, giving a gentle look to his sister.

"What about you?" Lionclaw asked curiously. "Do you wanna be leader?"

Swiftheart shook his head. "Not really, I did as a kit but I'm perfectly fine remaining a warrior. Violetfur would make a much better leader than me anyway."

"Same here," Lionclaw yawned. "When my father was deputy, I thought I wanted to be a leader but as time went on I realized I just like being a warrior. Sleeping in the warrior den and hunting with my Clanmates."

Dawnfire was slightly surprised, Lionclaw was a fierce, brave cat;

he would make a wonderful leader.

"What about you, Dawnfire?" Swiftheart's ears twitched. "Do you wanna be leader some day?" The question was a hard one for her, when she was kit she always wanted to be by her sister's side. as deputy to Willowkit being leader. After Willowkit died, that became a muddied thought, she didn't want to lead without Willowkit and as she grew up, the only focus was becoming a warrior. Dawnfire recalled Poppyfur's prophecy. *When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun.* She hadn't thought about it much, was it actually a prophecy? About her?

"Hey, you in there?" Dawnfire felt something flick over her ears, Swiftheart looked at her with a confused look in his eyes. "Well?"

"Uh, sorry." Dawnfire's ears burned with embarrassment, she didn't realized she was staring into space. "I guess, I wouldn't argue if the chance came up."

Swiftheart shrugged. "Nothing wrong with that." His ears perked as Violetfur called his name, the gathering was at an end, the Clans were leaving. "I gotta go." Swiftheart mewed. "I'll see you next moon!" He said and bounded off to join his Clan.

"We should get going to." Lionclaw said, his pelt brushing against Dawnfire's as they walked. They fell in behind their Clan and Lionclaw looked at her with an interesting glint in his eyes.

"What?" She asked, fighting down amusement. She loved the look in his eyes, it made her heart feel like a ball of down.

"I didn't know you wanted to be leader." He mewed gently.

"Oh, " Dawnfire slowed slightly. "Well, I'm not sure exactly." She said, looking at her paws as she walked. "When I was kit I really wanted to be Willowkit's deputy, it's what we always planned, but when she died she made me promise that I would become a warrior for her. I've done that, and now I don't know what to do. I wouldn't object to being leader but I don't know if I would be any good at it." Dawnfire stopped when she realized she'd been rambling. "Sorry." She flattened her ears.

"Don't be." Lionclaw purred softly. "Frankly, I think you would make a great leader." He said, eyes sparkling.

"Really? Why do you say that?" Dawnfire's pelt pricked slightly.

"You're brave, you're kind, you're loyal. You're good at taking charge and helping other cats and you're very caring about each and every cat in SunClan." Lionclaw's eyes were as soft as honey, his voice lifted Dawnfire's spirits.

"You really think so?" Dawnfire's pelt felt like it was on fire, she looked at her paws.

"I know so." Lionclaw touched his nose to her ear. Energy radiated through Dawnfire's paws, for the first time in a long time she felt like a kit again. Maybe she really could be leader someday.

Chapter 20

Dawnfire turned in her sleep, it felt like there were a million burrs in her pelt. When she opened her eyes she wasn't in the warriors den, she was in the Gathering Hollow. Dawnfire jumped to her paws, looking up at the sky, the half-moon glowed brightly. That's when she realized it was a dream, the half-moon was a few sunrises ago. There was a gentle spring breeze, carrying the scent of something sour. It smelled like burning, Dawnfire looked around for a smoke or fire but saw nothing. Then another scent washed over her, it was an unfamiliar one. The shape of a cat appeared from the shadows, it was obviously a Clan cat, a fluffy silver tom. He smelled of SunClan and had a gentle look in his eyes.

"Who are you?" Dawnfire asked, her voice steady, as he showed up she felt warm and safe, the burning smell was gone.

"My name is Feathernose, I was Honeywing's mentor." The tom replied, his voice was soft, and his blue eyes reminded Dawnfire of a gentle river.

"Where's Honeywing?" Dawnfire looked around for the golden medicine cat who normally visited her.

"Am I not good enough for you?" Feathernose's voice was stern, but when Dawnfire tensed he relaxed. "I'm joking." He purred. "I wanted to visit you and talk to you."

"But why?" Dawnfire questioned, wondering why this random StarClan cat wanted to talk to her. Honeywing had become normal, but Dawnfire never even really heard of Feathernose.

"So many questions." Feathernose purred. "There comes a time when you have to stop asking questions and just follow your heart." He looked her in the eyes. "Not every question has an answer."

Dawnfire shuffled her paws. "Right." She muttered. "So what did you want to talk about?" She thought he would say something else

about question asking, but he looked up at the half-moon, eyes reflecting the shine.

"Poppyfur told you about the prophecy." Feathernose mewed gently, slowly moving his gaze from the moon to Dawnfire.

Dawnfire's tensed at the mention of the prophecy. "That's a real thing?" Part of Dawnfire wished that Poppyfur was just a crazy medicine cat, but if a StarClan cat told her, then she had no choice but to believe that it was true.

Feathernose nodded. "It was originally given to Honeywing who passed it on to Poppyfur on the night of your birth. The only ones who know about this prophecy are Flowerstar, Poppyfur, and myself."

"How can you be sure it's about me?" Dawnfire asked, her claws scraping the grass. "I'm just a SunClan warrior."

"You're much more than that, Dawnfire." Feathernose said. "You have a powerful destiny ahead of you."

"Of what? What am I supposed to do?" Dawnfire demanded, growing on edge.

Feathernose rested his tail on her shoulder. "Calm down, young one. There is no telling what your future holds, no destiny is laid out in a perfect stone path. Destiny is decided by your own pawsteps."

Dawnfire sighed, recalling a dream she had as an apprentice. "Honeywing told me that once, when I was an apprentice; the first time I went to the Moonstone."

"Honeywing is a very wise cat." Feathernose said. "She was a wonderful medicine cat, always wanting to help; and that has not changed. Honeywing wishes she could guide you the entire way, but that's impossible. You need to find your own destiny."

Dawnfire lowered her head. "But why?" She asked. "Why me of all cats? Why not my sister?" Her voice caught in her throat. "Why did Willowkit have to die?" She found herself suddenly back in SunClan camp, when the world was still huge to her. Her sister's dying

figure, coughing and twitching. Was Willowkit's death a question that would never be answered?

Feathernose let out small sigh. "Death almost always happens for a reason, when it's a cat's time to join StarClan, it's unavoidable. Willowkit was meant to die."

"Why?!" Dawnfire was suddenly on her paws, pelt bristling. "Why did Willowkit have to die! She was jus ta kit!" Dawnfire's legs gave out and she fell to the ground.

"I will show you." Feathernose said, his voice losing it's soft edge. Dawnfire opened her eyes and she was outside SunClan camp, but it looked wrong. There was crowfood scattered about, bones of prey and the dens were broken.

"What is thi-" Feathernose silenced Dawnfire with his tail, she just watched. Dawnfire recognized some of the cats. Rainears, Bramblepelt, Sandfoot, Applespots, Icepetal, Turtleblaze, Yarrowtail, Cinderflame, and a few others. Flowerstar, Thornpelt nor Dawnfire was anywhere in sight of the camp, or the medicine cats. The cats were thin, with matted pelts and battle scars. A lanky, ruffled she-cat with hatred in her eyes, ,it was Willowkit.

"Willowstar!" Bramblepelt limped up to the SunTree. "We cannot keep invading the other Clans like this!" He shouted.

Willowstar lept down from the SunTree, teeth bared at Bramblepelt. "Do not question me, Bramblepelt!" She spat. "I'm your leader!"

"I understand but we've lost so many cats lately," He said. "With no medicine cats, our cats are dying quickly from battle wounds. Snowtail is dying as we speak!"

"She is weak!" Willowstar spat. "I will hear none of this! We attack MoonClan at dawn." Willowstar turned sharply and went into the SunTree which had been marked with claws several times.

"Willowstar." Another tom-cat padded up, Dawnfire barely recognized it as Turtleblaze, his pelt was dull and clung to his frame. "Things have to change or SunClan or going to die off." His

voice was stern.

"SunClan will control the forest!' Willowstar shouted, Dawnfire was haunted by the vision. Would this actually happen?

"You cannot still blame yourself for Dawnkit's death!' He shouted. "It was not your fault! Our our parents!"

Dawnfire tensed. *I'm dead?*

"Shut up, Turtleblaze!" Willowstar hissed. "Leave me alone!" She reached forward and swatted at him, it was then when the vision faded and Dawnfire and Feathernose were back in the Gathering Hollow.

"Would that have really happened?" Dawnfire looked at Feathernose, haunted by the appearance of SunClan.

"More than likely, Willowkit was an ambitious cat, and had you been the one to die instead of her, she would've been driven insane by the guilt and tore SunClan apart." Feathernose's tone was soft. "Willowkit's death was a tragedy but it's what needed to happen. She's happy in SunClan alongside Blazeheart and Windflight."

"What about their deaths? or Sunstreams? Or Dovetails?" Dawnfire looked at Feathernose desperately. "Were their deaths just? Were they meant to die?"

Feathernose's blank expression didn't change. "Some where, some weren't. It's not your problem to worry about."

Dawnfire's fur raised along her spine. "That's not an answer!" She shouted.

"Not all questions have an answer." Feathernose repeated himself from earlier, closing his eyes. "Just beware the thorn barrier."

"What does that mean?" Dawnfire questioned but the old medicine cat was fading. "Don't go!' Dawnfire shouted and ran forward, running right into something. Thorns dug into her face, she stumbled backwards, stepping on more thorns. It was then that she realized she was surrounded by thick, sharp thorns.

Dawnfire let out a gasp as she awoke in the warrior's den. Her face stung and her heart hurt from the vision she had been shown. Lionclaw stirred next to her and half-opened his amber eyes.

"Everything, okay?" He asked, voice just above a whisper.

Dawnfire nodded, trying to calm her racing heart. "Yeah, just a bad dream." Lionclaw yawned and nodded before falling back asleep. Dawnfire could see outside the den that it was dawn. She figured she might as well go on the dawn patrol. Dawnfire carefully made her way outside the warriors den, embracing the chilly newleaf air. Thornpelt was already up, talking to Snakewhisker, Squirreltail and Heatherpaw. Dawnfire approached them, shaking off a yawn. "Mind if I join?" She questioned.

Thornpelt gave a suspicious look, but it was Snakewhisker who spoke. "I don't mind." He said kindly.

"Neither do I." Squirreltail added, yawning as well.

"Very well." Thornpelt's voice was nearly a growl, Dawnfire realized that she had done barely interacting with her former mentor since she became a warrior. *He shouldn't have gotten my parents killed.* Dawnfire thought internally.

"Then let's go." Snakewhisker said and the patrol left. Dawnfire always loved newleaf mornings, dew sparkled on the grass and leaves like the stars themselves fell into the forest. As Dawnfire left she turned over her shoulder at Thornpelt who was standing in the camp. For a split second, the scene changed. It was Thornpelt, it was Willowstar, and the camp was in ruins. She was covered in blood, with the dead body of Flowerstar at her paws. Dawnfire let out a gasp and blinked, Thornpelt was back and clear of blood.

"Are you okay?" Squirreltail mewed, concern filling her green eyes. Heatherpaw and Snakewhisker looked at her like she was crazy.

"Yeah," Dawnfire swallowed her fear. "Just stepped on a rock, it surprised me." She lied, and the patrol continued. The rest of the patrol went without incident, except for when they came across the MoonClan border and saw the river was dangerously high.

"It's from all the melted snow." Snakewhisker mewed. "We'll have to tell Flowerstar so the Clan knows to be careful when patrolling or hunting around her. SunClan can't exactly swim."

Dawnfire looked at the river, getting flashbacks of the time she nearly drowned, or more exact; when Thornpelt nearly let her drown. Realize snapped inside Dawnfire, the constant warning of thorns in her dreams, the vision she had just seen, StarClan was warning her about Thornpelt! Thornpelt was both a danger to her and SunClan, the vision of Willowstar must have been Feathernose saying Thornpelt would lead SunClan much the same way. She had to tell someone, about everything. About Sunstream's death, about Windflight and Blazeheart's death, about the attack on the apprentices, it was all because of Thornpelt!

Flowerstar! Flowerstar knew about the prophecy, would she believe Dawnfire? She could only hope so. The patrol without issue, they returned to camp and Snakewhisker reported the river to Thornpelt who in turn went to Flowerstar's den.

Dawnfire waited outside, shuffling her paws nervously, waiting for Thornpelt to leave. When he exited the den he shot Dawnfire a sour look.

"What are you doing?" Thornpelt questioned, his tone suspicious.

"I'm going to talk to Flowerstar." Dawnfire replied, meeting his gaze.

"About what?" His voice was calm, but there was a fire in his eyes. What would happen if Flowerstar *did* find out? What would Thornpelt do to her?

"Something private." Dawnfire relied curtly, she broke the eye contact and brushed past him int Flowerstars den. Dawnfire recalled when she and Willowkit explored the leader's den for the first time, she felt a pang of sadness, but shoved it away.

"Dawnfire?" Flowerstar said once Dawnfire stepped into the light, the den was well lit with soft moss. There was a recently eaten mouse on the ground, Dawnfire was relieved to see Flowerstar

eating again. Not only that, but Flowerstar's coat was shiny and she looked healthy. It was almost as if she had never lost that life.

"Hi, Flowerstar." Dawnfire dipped her head respectfully, she heard a sight noise of amusement from the leader.

"What do you need?" She asked. "If this is about the river, Thornpelt already told me. I was about to tell the Clan, actually."

"Oh, uh," Dawnfire's tail twitched. "A few things actually." Dawnfire stood up straight and attempted to speak. "Well, Poppyfur told me about the uh..." Her voice caught. "Prophecy."

"I see..." Flowerstar looked past Dawnfire, into the camp before returning her green eyes to Dawnfire. "She told me she was going to tell you. I didn't realize that she already did." Flowerstar sat down, resting her tail across her paws. "What do you think of it?"

"Well..." Dawnfire's tail twitched. "I'm not quite sure." Even the dream with Feathernose didn't really make her feel any more confident about it. "But, that's not the main reason why I'm here."

Interest and confusion bubbled in Flowerstar's green eyes. "Oh? Well please tell me why you came."

"It's about Thornpelt..." Dawnfire felt very self-conscious suddenly.

Flowerstar seemed to tense. "What about him?" She questioned, the leader seemed like she was on guard now.

"I have reason to believe that he is responsible for not only the SunClan apprentices being attacked a while ago...but also the death of my parents."

"Those are quite some accusations, Dawnfire." Her voice was cold, Dawnfire's entire body tensed. "Why do you think that?"

"Well...when he was talking to Echoheart...it seemed to be...rehearsed almost...and I know he really wanted to be deputy but he couldn't when my father was...so he lied about about how big the badger was and cost the life of both Blazeheart and Windflight, I was made a warrior and he was made deputy. Also,

when Tigertail was driving away the fox, Thornpelt tripped him..." Dawnfire realized she just had spouted all of her suspicions out.

Flowerstar narrowed her eyes. "Dawnfire," She said, rising to her paws. The leader's body was rigid. "Losing your parents was a great tragedy, and I believe that you are simply upset about their deaths."

"N-No," Dawnfire was slightly shocked, Flowerstar didn't believe her! "Thornpelt pretty much told me himself that night..."

"You were upset, your mind played a trick on you. Thornpelt is a loyal warrior, ambitious yes, but not a murderer."

I haven't killed a single cat, Dawnpaw.Foxes, badgers and other cats have killed but not me. I have not killed a single cat. Thornpelt's words echoed in her ears.

"He nearly let me drown when I was an apprentice, he hates me. He did this to my ears." Dawnfire twitched her niced ears.

"He was a tough, mentor, but it payed off. You're a fantastic warrior." Flowerstar was completely ignoring her arguments. "I don't want to hear anymore of this."

"But, Flowerstar--"

"*Silence!*" Dawnfire stumbled backwards when Flowerstar hissed at her. "Thornpelt is a brave, loyal warrior! I don't want to hear another word of this, Dawnfire." Her voice was now growl. "Now leave."

Dawnfire dipped her head and turned away, tail dragging on the ground. She felt like a kit that was just scolded by her mother. As Dawnfire exited the den she noticed Thornpelt standing outside, he met Dawnfire's gaze with malice and triumph. Dawnfire felt dread in her belly like a giant stone, making her feel sick. What would happen now?

Chapter 21

"Dawnfire!" A stern voice yelled. Dawnfire looked up from the mouse she had been eating to see Flowerstar. Dawnfire swallowed the last piece of her prey nervously and stood up.

"Yes?" She asked, voice shaking slightly. It had been three sunrises since Dawnfire confronted Flowerstar and been harshly turned away.

"We're going to MoonClan territory." The pale leader said. "I want to talk to Shadowstar about forming a barrier around the river."

"And you want me to go?" Dawnfire questioned.

"I said you, now hurry up." The leader snapped, Dawnfire quickly padded over to her and stood beside the leader. As she did, Redclaw and Brackenpaw padded up as well, followed by Thornpelt.

"This is the patrol?" Thornpelt asked, eyes resting on Dawnfire. Her body tensed and she avoided his gaze.

"Yes." Flowerstar said, her voice more stern than usual. Dawnfire must've really upset her, Flowerstar was never this stiff. "Now let's go."

The patrol left the camp, Dawnfire padded alongside Brackenpaw who seemed very happy to be going to MoonClan camp. He would be a warrior soon, he was almost bigger than Dawnfire. They crossed SunClan territory with ease, the entire time Dawnfire felt Thornpelt's eyes on her back the entire time. When they reached the river it was even higher than when she first patrolled.

"We can cross over here." Flowerstar padded along the bank until they came to a small log that cross over the river. "Once we get across we will wait for a patrol." Flowerstar crossed the log with ease and turned to face her patrol. "Now you, Brackenpaw."

The ginger apprentice rushed up to the log, hesitating slightly before he placed his paws on the wood. Brackenpaw crossed easily and sat beside his leader.

"You go next, Dawnfire." Thornpelt's voice was as cold as ice. For a moment Dawnfire hesitated, last time she crossed this river with Thornpelt she nearly fell in.

"Don't be scared, Dawnfire." Brackenpaw mewed. "It's not hard at all!" Dawnfire's paws twitched as she placed them on the log. It wasn't slipping she was scared of. Thornpelt wouldn't risk his own way across right? Dawnfire was relieved when her paws touched the grass on the other side of the river. She stood beside Brackenpaw as Thornpelt crossed.

"Now we wait." Flowerstar mewed after Thornpelt sat down, it wasn't long before a MoonClan patrol showed up. Dawnfire recognized Tawnytail, Smudgenose, Frostfire, Mosspaw and Swiftheart.

"Flowerstar." Tawnytail mewed, slightly on edge. "What are you and your cats doing in MoonClan territory?"

"I wanted to speak to Shadowstar about something," Flowerstar dipped her head to the MoonClan deputy. "I promise you we bring no harm."

Tawnytail hesitated slightly, and Smudgenose looked as if he was going to attack but Tawnytail gave a slight nod. "Very well, we will take you to camp."

"Thank you, Tawnytail." Flowerstar purred and the SunClan patrol joined with MoonClan. Swiftheart fell in beside Dawnfire.

"So what's this about?" He asked. "Is everything alright in SunClan?" He questioned, slightly concerned.

"Of course." Dawnfire replied, very aware of Thornpelt behind her. "Flowerstar just wants to talk to Shadowstar."

The MoonClan camp was a large empty moor surrounded by the same white trees in the Spirit Woods, only these ones didn't seem to

glow. There was a small holly bush with no cats near it, beside it was a larger bush that Dawnfire assumed was the warriors den since Bonefur and Icepool were talking outside of it. They stopped when they spotted the SunClan patrol, Bonefur gave them a suspicious look.

The elders looked at them with glares, Dawnfire was surprised at how many they had. Brambleflight, Sandfur and Longwhisker sat outside talking with each other while Rainypelt an Dogtail slept in the sun.

They approached a large rock formation that Dawnfire figured was the leader's den. Tawnytail stopped at the entrance. "Shadowstar!" She called. "We have visitors."

The large leader stepped out from the shadows of his den, and looked over the SunClan cats curiously. "What's going on Flowerstar?" He demanded.

"With the melting of the snow the river has swelled immensely, I worry for the safety of my cats. SunClan can't swim, so I was wondering if we could build a barrier around the river, you could on MoonClan's side and we will build one on SunClan's side." Flowerstar explained calmly.

Shadowstar thought for a moment. "It would be smart." He said. "With Brokenpaw and Tallpaw, we do have a few cats that don't swim as much as the others." Shadowstar hesitated. "Very well, Flowerstar. We will build a barrier, my cats are in my best interest."

Flowerstar dipped her head. "Thank you, Shadowstar. We will get started immediately."

Shadowstar nodded. "Jayfur and Ebonywing, will you escort SunClan back to their territory?" The two warriors nodded and Jayfur was on his feet, as was Ebonywing.

"Ready?" Ebonywing asked, her voice was slightly raspy.

"Yes, let's go." Flowerstar nodded and they left the camp.

"What's it like in MoonClan?" Brackenpaw asked Jayfur.

"Brackenpaw, please." Redclaw silenced his apprentice. "You're nearly a warrior, act like it." He growled.

"It's quite alright, Redclaw. He'll never get to live in another Clan, it's natural for him to be curious" Jayfur purred. "I'm sure it's like living in SunClan, only MoonClan prefers the nighttime to the day time. We do most of our hunting at night."

"How do you see?" Brackenpaw questioned. "Wouldn't you be tripping over roots and stuff?"

"If you couldn't tell," Ebonyclaw put in. "Most of MoonClan's territory is moorland. We don't have to worry about tripping, and since it's dark we don't have to worry about our prey seeing us."

"And MoonClan can see better than the other Clans at night." Jayfur added. "We've adapted, just like SunClan enjoys the heat and their eyes are used to the sun."

Brackenpaw's eyes sparkled. "Wow, that's cool." He purred. "What about AshClan? What are they good at? And LichenClan?"

"That question will have to wait." Flowerstar mewed as they approached the border. "Ask a LichenClan or AshClan cat at the next gathering."

"Alright!' The apprentice boasted and approached the river, looking over into SunClan territory.

"Thank you, again." Flowerstar dipped her head to the two MoonClan warriors. "You've been kind to us."

"You've done nothing to anger us." Jayfur purred. "MoonClan enjoys the peace." The silver tom dipped his head as did Ebonywing.

SunClan crossed with ease, the only issue being Dawnfire being splashed by the cold water. She felt comfortable as the scent of her own Clan washed over her. She wouldn't want to be in any other Clan than SunClan.

"Thornpelt, when we return will you gather some of the best builders so we can get started on that barrier." Flowerstar asked her

deputy.

"Of course, Flowerstar." Dawnfire felt uneasy which each word, Thornpelt spoke. He knew that she tried to reveal him to Flowerstar. What would he do? Would he try and kill her? Dawnfire wanted to, with every fur on her body, that he wasn't a killer, but her brain knew differently. Thornpelt wasn't going to stop at deputy, he wanted to be leader. The warnings of thorns in her dreams were directed at him, if she didn't do something, then he would win.

They returned to camp and Thornpelt sent Bramblepelt, Sandfoot, Rainears, Snakewhisker and Lionclaw to work on the barrier. With Lionclaw on the barrier and Yarrowtail and Cinderflame on a patrol, Dawnfire decided she would talk with Pebblestep; who had recently received her full medicine cat name.

Dawnfire approached the medicine cat den where Poppyfur sat across Pebblestep, both she-cats looked very serious.

"Say Adderstrike comes to you with cracked and sore pads from being on Jagged Rocks all day, what would you give him?" Poppyfur questioned.

Pebblestep barely hesitated, "I would give him comfrey, chewed into a pulp and rubbed on his pads."

"Good." Poppyfur dipped her head, neither of them seemed to notice Dawnfire. "Now, Willownose has a belly ache and we need some mallow, where could we find some?"

Once again, Pebblestep didn't hesitate. "We could find mallow near the river for MoonClan and the gathering hollow."

"Good." Poppyfur's eyes sparkled with pride. "You're sharp as a thorn." The medicine cat praised, then turned to see Dawnfire. "Do you need something?"

"Just wanted to talk to Pebblestep." Dawnfire replied, twitching her ears. "To say hi."

"Well you can say hi by helping her gather some herbs." Poppyfur

stood up and stretched, she turned to her apprentice. "Nightwing's been complaining about sore joints. Go around Jagged Rocks and find some ragwort. We could also use some yarrow."

Pebblestep dipped her head. "Of course, Poppyfur." Then she turned to Dawnfire. "If you don't mind?"

"Sure, I'll go." Dawnfire purred. She enjoyed tasks like gather herbs or moss. Especially with Pebblestep.

The two she-cats made their way out of camp and into the forest. Pebblestep looked more confident since she became a full medicine cat, and no one could deny that she was good at what she did. She was gentle, yet not afraid of an injury.

"Is there something wrong?" Pebblestep asked suddenly, taking Dawnfire off guard.

"Yeah, why do you ask?" Dawnfire questioned, nearly tripping over a stone.

"Because, you look at Thornpelt like you would a fox, and I saw you coming out of Flowerstar's den looking ashamed. What happened?" Pebblestep's eyes were filled with concern.

"Is it really that obvious?" Dawnfire muttered, then she let out a sigh. Would Pebblestep belive her? "I think that Thornpelt is responsible for the deaths of my parents, as well as when AshClan attacked the apprentices, Tigertail's death too."

"Why do you say that?" Pebblestep questioned, she didn't seem judgemental or anything, just concerned. Dawnfire explained the same things she explained to Flowerstar as well as what happened when she left Flowerstar's den. Pebblestep listened quietly, nodding her head slightly as Dawnfire spoke. Dawnfire struggled keeping her anger and sadness down, her voice cracked whenever she spoke about her parents. When she finished, Pebblestep was quiet. Dawnfire figured that the medicine cat would just call her liar.

"That's a lot of evidence." Pebblestep finally said. "Honestly, I could see him being like that. Thornpelt always scared me when I was

younger."

"So you believe me?" Dawnfire said, hope sparking in her chest like a small fire.

"Not exactly," Pebblestep said sheepishly. "I understand where you're coming from, he could very well be dangerous but he's not gonna let any cat see it."

Dawnfire's tail drooped. "I suppose you're right." She looked at her white paws. "I'm just scared, he saw me come from Flowerstar's den and if he is dangerous...I don't want to be looking over my shoulder every moment of every day."

"I understand." Pebblestep said, her voice soft. "But I'm sure that everything will be fine, Dawnfire."

Dawnfire tried to lift her spirits, but couldn't seem to find the strength for it. The two she-cats reached Jagged Rocks where they gathered as many herbs as they could before returning to camp. Pebblestep returned to her medicine cat duties, but Lionclaw was back in camp, carrying a large catch.

"Good hunt!" Dawnfire praised the golden tom and hurried up to him as he set his prey on the fresh-kill pile.

"Thanks." Lionclaw puffed out his chest. "I caught more than anyone." His eyes sparkled with confidence, Dawnfire let out a purr.

"Of course you did." Dawnfire knew that it probably wasn't the best idea fanning his ego the way she did, but she loved the way he would light up.

"Let's sit down." Lionclaw rested his tail on her shoulders and they moved over to the back of the camp, sitting together. Dawnfire swore she felt sparks between their fur as it touched, her heart raced a little faster.

"Has everything been okay with you?" Lionclaw asked, his amber eyes slightly concerned. "You seem...off."

Dawnfire let out a purr." Of course," She reassured him. "Just busy

and tired, you know?" She pressed against him. She trusted Lionclaw, but Thornpelt was his uncle, she didn't want him to have any doubts about his family if her fears were wrong.

Lionclaw purred. "Good." He touched his muzzle to hers. "You know I'll always keep you safe, Dawnfire." He whispered. For a moment, she felt assured and safe but then she met Thornpelt's gaze. How could Lionclaw protect her from him?

Chapter 22

"Heatherflight! Flamepetal! Brackenpelt!" The Clan cheered as Flowerstar named their newest warriors. The three new warriors held their heads high, as did their parents Bramblepelt and Willownose. Lionclaw had his chest puffed out and his eyes glowed with pride as his apprentice was named. Squirreltail and Redclaw's eyes also shimmered with pride, Dawnfire let out a purr of happiness; new warriors were always a good thing for any Clan.

"Now," Flowerstar continued. "We have no current apprentices in training, with the exception of Pebblestep." The gray and white she-cat's ears twitched when Flowerstar mentioned her. "And all of the apprentices duties cannot just fall on to her, she does have her own medicine cat duties. So, I'm asking all warriors, not just young, to participate in all Clan duties, it will be a few moons yet before Cloudkit becomes an apprentice."

"Or you could make me an apprentice now!" Cloudkit piped up from where he watched at the nursery.

"Hush, Cloudkit!' Willownose hissed at her adopted kid. "You're being rude." Cloudkit backed up but didn't look hurt or scared, he just sat back down.

Flowerstar let out a purr of amusement. "As I was saying...it won't hurt our warriors to participate in some apprentice duties."

"We're not that old yet." Nightwing mewed from Hawktalon's side. "We can help provide for ourselves."

"Just because I'm blind, doesn't mean I can't help out around camp." Hawktalon added, his blind eyes cheerful.

"You always enjoyed having busy paws." Thornpelt dipped his head to his parents. "As for the rest of us, I don't care if you're a senior warrior or not, you will be helping around camp."

"Thank you, Thornpelt. " Flowerpelt dipped her slender head and leapt down from the SunTree. Dawnfire avoided eye contact with Thornpelt as much as she could, if looks could kill she would be bleeding out on the forest floor.

Dawnfire stood up and approached Pebblestep. "I don't mind getting some moss if you need it, I always enjoyed doing that." She suggested, which was true. Dawnfire loved collecting moss, it gave her time to think and it was always relaxing.

"That would help a lot," Poppyfur said, stepping in beside her apprentice. "Tonight is the half-moon and we need to prepare to travel."

Pebblestep nodded. "Thank you so much, Dawnfire." The she-cat purred happily. "I have to go through what herbs we have and put in mind which ones we need."

"You're always so thorough," Poppyfur said with a yawn and turned away, brushing her tail against Pebblestep's flank. "I'm glad you're my apprentice." The medicine cat padded confidently into her den.

Dawnfire felt a surge of admiration for Pebblestep, when Flowerstar lost a life to greencough, Pebblestep blamed herself. Now, however, her blue eyes shimmered with confidence in her medicine cat abilities.

Dawnfire left the medicine cat's side, she noticed Lionclaw leading Rainears, Turtleblaze and Applespots out of camp for a patrol. Thornpelt was talking to Icepetal, Sandfoot and Snakewhisker, planning out a patrol she assumed. Bramblepelt had a squirrel in his jaws that he delivered to Cloudkit and Willownose. Willownose wasn't Cloudkit's mother and she no longer had to stay in the nursery to nurse him, but the she-cat stayed in there with him anyway. Dawnfire assumed she didn't want Cloudkit to be alone in the den, there were no other expecting queens and no other kits. As for Bramblepelt, he was also rather close to Cloudkit, acting like a second father to him.

Dawnfire enjoyed when Cinderflame, Yarrowtail or Pebblestep would visit their sibling and play with him, especially Yarrowtail.

Rockfur visited his son almost everyday, he also seemed to have formed a close friendship with Willownose and Bramblepelt, expressing his gratitude to the queen for taking care of his son. *I hope Dovetail can see how much the Clan adores her kit.* Dawnfire thought with happiness glowing inside her chest.

"Dawnfire," A sharp mew said, Dawnfire turned to see Fawnheart, her ears and tail flicking with annoyance and her eyes like claws.

"Do you need something?" Dawnfire asked her, normally Fawnheart never spoke to Dawnfire.

"Yes, Poppyfur said you were collecting moss and Thornpelt volunteered me to come and help you." Her voice was sharp and angry.

"Uh," Dawnfire really didn't want to spend time alone with Fawnheart, they never had a good relationship, even with how close Fawnheart was to Turtleblaze. "I really don't need any help."

"I don't want to help you but I'm not stupid enough to ignore a command from Thornpelt, I figured you would understand that." Fawnheart snarled, Dawnfire suddenly wished that any other cat in the Clan had joined her. *It could be worse.* Dawnfire thought. *It could be Thornpelt.*

"Alright then," Dawnfire said awkwardly. "Let's go." Dawnfire padded across the camp, pushing through the brush that guarded the back entrance. They passed the apprentice den, Dawnfire was grateful she didn't have to sleep in there anymore. The moss hollow was abundant with moss as always. Dawnfire and Fawnheart moved down the mossy slope into the hollow. Dawnfire sat in front of a mossy wall and Fawnheart sat well away from her. Dawnfire shook her head slightly and placed a forepaw on the moss.

As she extended her claws slightly and stripped the moss away, Dawnfire couldn't help but feel like an apprentice again, when things were simpler. *Were things really that simple?* Dawnfire questioned herself. *No,* she answered, *Nothing was simpler, not after Willowkit's death.* She let out a soft sigh and turned over her shoulder to look at Fawnheart. Dawnfire could only see the side of

her face but she saw that the she-cat was thinking deeply about something.

"Dawnfire! Fawnheart!" Dawnfire jumped as someone yelled their names, almost wrenching a claw out on the moss. She turned and saw Pebblestep standing at the top of the hollow. "MoonClan attacked one of our patrols," She huffed. "Applespots is badly injured and they're outnumbered, you two are fast, Flowerstar wanted me to send you two to meet up with the backup patrol."

Forgetting about the moss, Dawnfire and Fawnheart quickly rose to their paws. Why was MoonClan attacking? There was no time for questions, however. Pebblestep turned and ran back into camp, Fawnheart and Dawnfire hot on her heels. Inside camp Dawnfire saw blood leading to the medicine den, with a quick glance she saw that Applespots was unmoving, Poppyfur was frantically gathering herbs.

"Hurry up!" Fawnheart snapped, pulling Dawnfire's gaze away from Applespots. Dawnfire picked up her pace and the two she-cats ran out of the camp towards the MoonClan border. Dawnfire tried running through her mind why MoonClan would attack, they were so friendly the other day. They quickly crossed the forest, it wasn't long before Dawnfire heard yowling and hissing. They reached the MoonClan border where a full fledged battle had broken out.

Violetfur had Snowtail pinned and was snapping at her muzzle while the white she-cat battered her belly. Snakewhisker and Heatherflight fought Jayfur and Ravenwing, Heatherflight had blood welling around a wound on her hear and Jayfur was missing several patches of fur. Dawnfire's gaze went to Lionclaw, who had Swiftheart in his paws, the small MoonClan tom's was lined with claw marks, Lionclaw's eye was swollen. Dawnfire heard a yowl of pain and turned to see Turtleblaze on the ground, there was a deep wound in his side, the black she-cat Ebonywing towered over him, eyes glowing with malice.

Dawnfire charged forward, barreling into the she-cat and knocking her to the side. She felt a gasp of surprise from Ebonywing and used the moment to rake her claws down Ebonywing's side. The she-cat yowled and heaved Dawnfire off, Dawnfire's shoulder hit a sharp

rock but she recovered quickly.

"Thief!" Ebonywing spat before bounding away, blood streaming down her sides. *Thief?* Dawnfire questioned herself. Dawnfire shook the thought off and moved to Turtleblaze who has sitting up, looking at his wound.

"You should get back to camp," Dawnfire said, unease growing in her chest as she looked at the deep wound.

"I'm fine," Turtleblaze said, his voice pained. He went to stand up but Dawnfire could see that his entire body was rigid with pain.

"No," Dawnfire told her brother sternly. "Get back to camp and have Poppyfur or Pebblestep look over your wound."

Turtleblaze looked as if he might argue, but he just nodded and slipped into the forest. Dawnfire let out a sigh and suddenly she was taken to the ground. Claws dug into her spine and she let out a hiss of pain, Dawnfire quickly flipped onto her back, a risky move but she threw her attacker off. Dawnfire quickly lept to her paws and faced him, it was Mosspaw.

"Picking a fight with a warrior, huh?" Dawnfire said. "Aren't you a bit young?" Rage grew in Mosspaw's green eyes.

"I'm stronger than you!" Mosspaw hissed and jumped onto Dawnfire, causing her to roll backwards. Dawnfire lashed out her claws at the apprentice, Mosspaw was small but she was very quick. Dawnfire missed her attack and Mosspaw bit into her foreleg. Dawnfire slashed her claws across Mosspaw's head, blood welled from behind her ears. Mosspaw moved forward quickly, but Dawnfire dropped down and swiped at her paws, causing her to trip and stumble to the ground.

"Mosspaw!" Dawnfire heard the hiss Tawnytail, Mosspaw's mother. The MoonClan deputy charged at Dawnfire claws extended and teeth bared. Dawnfire prepared for impact but Tawnytail was thrown to the side by Thornpelt.

"What is the meaning of this attack!" Thornpelt spat. "Why are you

attacking my Clan!" He demanded, pinning Tawnytail to the ground.

"You stole MoonClan prey!" Tawnytail hissed. "When you visited our camp, you stole our prey!"

"No SunClan cat stole any prey!" Thornpelt dug his claws into Tawnytail's shoulder, the she-cat yowled in pain.

"No!" Mosspaw howled, and jumped up. Dawnfire knew Mosspaw couldn't interfere with Thornpelt, he could end up killing her so Dawnfire blocked the apprentice from going to him by shoving her to the side.

"We found a rabbit that reeked of SunClan!" Tawnytail spat, panic was in her green eyes, she struggled under Thornpelt's grasp. Blood was welling at an alarming rate from Thornpelt's claws.

"Thornpelt!" Dawnfire shouted, leaving Mosspaw alone. "Let her go, warriors don't fight to kill."

Thornpelt snapped his head to look at Dawnfire, his eyes burned with rage, Dawnfire took a step back, for a moment she thought he would turn on her. Instead, he turned away and released Tawnytail, before she could get up Thornpelt sank his teeth into the scruff of her neck and violently threw her across the river border, she did not get up. "Get out of SunClan territory!" Thornpelt roared, the MoonClan cats stopped, saw their deputy and quickly jumped over to their side of river. Violetfur and Jayfur lifted Tawnytail to her paws, with Jayfur giving a hate filled gaze to Thornpelt and Dawnfire. "Go home, SunClan. See your wounds are tended to."

Dawnfire saw Lionclaw helped Flamepetal to her paws, the new warrior had a deep claw mark on her shoulder but seemed to be okay. Dawnfire met Lionclaw's gaze and nodded, letting him know she was okay. He nodded back and began helping Flamepetal away. Dawnfire's own body ached from fighting both Mosspaw and Ebonywing, but she had no serious wounds she didn't think. As she began walking away, Thornpelt cut her off.

"Don't you ever tell me what to do in front of another warrior." He

growled, hatred still burning bright in his eyes.

"There was no need to be that rough with Tawnytail," Dawnfire replied, standing her ground.

Thornpelt stepped forward, claws still extended. Dawnfire didn't step back, but her entire body tensed. "Watch yourself, Dawnfire. You don't want to get in my way." He growled in her ear.

"Is that a threat?" Dawnfire hoped she sounded more confident than she felt, blood roared in her eyes, but she couldn't show fear.

"Only if you make it one." Thornpelt growled one last before turning away and running through the forest, Dawnfire was the only one left. She let out a sigh and let the fear flow from her body. There was no mistaking it now, if Dawnfire stood against Thornpelt, he would kill her.

Chapter 23

Dawnfire rose from her nest and stretched, her claws digging at her moss. That was the first peaceful sleep she had in a long time. Poppyfur encouraged all the cats injured from the MoonClan battle to take an extra day to rest. Dawnfire's wounds weren't serious, but her body had taken quite the beating from Ebonywing and Mosspaw. The worst wounds were Applespots who was still in the medicine cat den, but would recover in a moon or so, Turtleblaze who couldn't patrol or hunt and Snakewhisker who had a twisted paw, but was back on light duties. The three newest warriors were also able to complete vigil and all was well in SunClan. Mostly, anyway.

Ever since the battle Dawnfire was getting more and more death glares from Thornpelt, he was not happy with her for yelling at him to let Tawnytail go. Dawnfire couldn't let it bother her, she had to continue without the fear of Thornpelt looming over like a storm cloud. Dawnfire exited the warriors den and saw that life was busy in the camp. Adderstrike was having a conversation with Snakewhisker, Flowerstar was in the sun, sharing tongues with Stormwind. Hawktalon and Nightwing were also relaxing in the sun, Nightwing appeared to be asleep while Hawktalon's blind eyes gazed up at the sky. Dawnfire heard happy squeals and turned to see Cloudkit jumping on a very exhausted looking Willownose.

She let out a purr of amusement and went over to the two. "Having fun?" Dawnfire asked the queen. Willownose looked up and let out a sigh.

"Loads of fun," She purred. "This kit is wearing me out, never ending playtimes. I only wish he had littermates to play with."

"I have siblings," Cloudkit flopped down on Willownose's back. "But Cinderflame and Yarrowtail are on patrol, and Pebblestep is doing her medicine cat stuff." He pouted.

"You know, Willownose," Dawnfire said. "If you wanna go rest I

could probably take Cloudkit out your whiskers for a while."

"Really?" Willownose's gaze instantly lit up. "That would help me so much, I don't get much sleep with his restlessness."

"Absolutely, most patrols are out right now so I could keep him busy," Dawnfire purred. "I could use some kit playtime."

"That sounds fun!" Cloudkit stumbled off his adoptive mother and bounced over to Dawnfire.

"Thank you so much, Dawnfire!" Willownose stood up and yawned. "It means a lot, thank you."

"No problem," Dawnfire purred as the brown she-cat went into the nursery. Cloudkit jumped around Dawnfire.

"What are we gonna do? Will you take me out of camp?" He questioned, his blue eyes wide with excitement.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," Dawnfire laughed. "But maybe I could show you the hunter's crouch?"

"Oh, yes please!" Cloudkit squeeked with excitement, suddenly he dropped to the floor, sticking his rump high in the air.

Dawnfire let out a *mrrow* of laughter. "You're not gonna catch much like that I'm afraid." She said before placing a paw on his hindquarters, gently pushing them down. "You want your entire body low to the ground, but not so low that you disrupt the forest floor."

"Understood," Cloudkit was determined, he moved forward, very clumsily but keeping his form. He leapt forward and pounced on a stray leaf. He turned around, blue eyes flooding with excitement.

"What's going on here?" Dawnfire heard a deep voice and turned to see Rockfur, she was suddenly nervous that he wouldn't want her teaching his son how to hunt.

"Dawnfire showed me how to do the hunting crouch!" Cloudkit released his leaf prey and bounced over to Rockfur.

Rockfur looked down at his son for moment then back up to Dawnfire, his eyes soft. "Well that's very kind of you, Dawnfire. Did you thank her?"

"Thank you, Dawnfire!" Cloudkit said, Dawnfire admired his energy. He was a very lively kit, Dawnfire could see why Willownose was so exhausted.

"It's not a problem at all." Dawnfire purred, twitching her tail with amusement. "He's a fun kit, he'll make a great warrior."

"Oh, I know." Rockfur purred, wrapping his tail around Cloudkit. "Much like his mother and siblings."

Dawnfire remembered Rockfur's treatment of Pebblestep, still only an apprentice at the time, when Dovetail died. Perhaps losing his mate softened him up, he was no longer angry with Pebblestep, or at least he didn't show that he was. He loved his children, all of them, and that's what mattered.

"When I'm apprentice I want Dawnfire to be my mentor!" Cloudkit said excitedly. "She's so nice!"

Dawnfire's pelt burned slightly, "Well, that's up to Flowerstar." She said. Dovetail said when she died that she wanted Dawnfire to mentor Cloudkit, but Flowerstar wasn't happy with her after she accused Thornpelt of murder.

"I hope she picks you!" Cloudkit squeaked, before pouncing in his father's tail, Rockfur looked at Dawnfire.

"I feel like you would be a good mentor to Cloudkit," He mewed, eyes showing a hint of some emotion that Dawnfire couldn't place. "He really likes you, and I know Dovetail did too."

"She was an amazing cat, and Cloudkit, all of her kits, are wonderful. Yarrowtail and Cinderflame are wonderful warriors and Pebblestep is an amazing medicine cat."

"She certainly proved herself by saving the Clan from greencough, and I could see Cinderflame leading the Clan one day." Rockfur mewed. "And of course, Cloudkit will be an incredible warrior.

Dawnfire noticed with unease that he said nothing about Yarrowtail, it's true that he was smaller than most warriors, but he was quick, a great hunter and an amazing tracker.

"Hey, you," Dawnfire jumped slightly as Lionclaw brushed up against her. "Having fun with the kit?"

"Yep," Dawnfire purred. "He's a handful, but he's very eager and energetic." She watched Cloudkit return to his leaf and bat it around.

Lionclaw's voice lowered. "You'd make a wonderful mother." He said. Dawnfire jumped suddenly, her entire pelt burning.

"Uh, what?" She stuttered. "A mother?" She hadn't even thought about having kits of her own.

Lionclaw laughed. "Relax," He touched his nose to her shoulder. "We don't have to worry about kits for a long time, and if you don't want any that's fine too."

Dawnfire relaxed, then glanced at Lionclaw. Did he want kits? She suddenly pictured him playing with smaller versions of himself, laughing and teaching them the ways of a warrior. It made her heart warm up. *I know he would make a wonderful father...*

"Dawnfire!" Thornpelt shouted from across the camp. "Make yourself useful and join the next hunting patrol. Adderstrike is leading it." He turned away and appeared to go to the medicine den. What did he need from there? Dawnfire sighed and looked at Lionclaw.

"Cheer up," Lionclaw mewed. "He's just a bit strict, you had him for a mentor you should know."

Dawnfire nodded and headed over to Adderstrike. *I know a lot more than you think...*

Chapter 24

Dawnfire moved through the forest with ease, Turtleblaze was beside her and Brackenpelt behind them, Snowtail led the patrol. They had just left the AshClan border and were heading back to camp. The forest was lush and green and newleaf was in full bloom, everything was new and growing. Dawnfire, and many of SunClan's cats were hoping this would bring kits. Cloudkit was nearly an apprentice and he was the only inhabitant of the nursery with the exception of Willownose. Recently, Willownose had returned to warrior duties, but still kept Cloudkit company in the nursery.

The patrol pushed through the entrance of camp and Snowtail reported to Thornpelt while Brackenpelt joined Heatherflight and Squirreltail by the fresh-kill pile.

"Dawnfire," Dawnfire turned to see Flowerstar standing outside her den. "I'm glad you're back, would you mind coming into my den? I want to talk to you about something."

"Of course, Flowerstar." Dawnfire looked at her brother who nodded at her.

"Have fun with that," He said. "I'm gonna see if I can join another patrol." He padded quickly away and went over to Thornpelt.

Dawnfire was suddenly nervous, what did Flowerstar want to talk about? Was it Thornpelt, she had been avoiding the deputy as much as possible, maybe she had noticed, but without hesitation Dawnfire quickly went over to Flowerstar and followed her inside the SunTree.

"What did you need, Flowerstar?" Dawnfire dipped her head respectfully before asking. What was this about?

"Cloudkit is finally six moons old, and is ready to become an apprentice." She said. "As you know, Dovetail wanted you to become Cloudkit's mentor." She said, for a moment Dawnfire was

excited before Flowerstar continued talking. "But, I don't want to make you a mentor simply because Dovetail wanted you to be."

"Oh," Dawnfire spirit's dropped. *Why take me in here just to tell me I can't mentor Cloudkit?* "I understand. Who are you going to chose for his mentor, if you don't mind me asking?"

"I never said I wasn't going to chose you, Dawnfire." Flowerstar added, taking Dawnfire by surprise. "I simply said that I wasn't going to just because Dovetail wanted you to be. Dovetail was my neice, daughter to Stormwind and I want her kit to be mentored by the best. Not only do I think you'll do an incredible mentor but I know you will teach Cloudkit how to be an honorable and brave warrior."

Dawnfire was nearly speechless, she figured that Flowerstar was mad at her for bringing up Thornpelt. "Are you sure?"

"I've thought a lot about this," Flowerstar continued. "And there's no other cat I would want to be Cloudkit's mentor than you."

Dawnfire dipped her head. "Thank you so much, Flowerstar. This means so much to me, I won't let your or Dovetail down."

"I'm sure you won't," Flowerstar rested her tail on Dawnfire's shoulders. "I understand your concerns with Thornpelt, and I did take what you said into consideration." Dawnfire looked up in surprise. "But, unless Thornpelt proves to me himself that he is a traitor I cannot take any action against him. I'm sure he is a loyal warrior at heart."

Dawnfire nodded, she didn't want to argue, Flowerstar was an incredible leader and if something happened, Dawnfire knew that Flowerstar would make the right choice.

"Now," Flowerstar's gaze softened with happiness. "Let's get to that ceremony." She purred. Dawnfire nodded and they stepped outside. Flowerstar turned and jumped onto the SunTree, climbing to the top branch. "Let all cats enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Her voice rang out through the camp, filling Dawnfire with a sense of safety and

comfort.

Cats turned around from what they were turning and began heading towards the center of camp. Cloudkit bounced out of the nursery with Willownose after him. "Cloudkit, stop! You're fur is a mess!" Dawnfire purred, Willownose seemed like his actual mother.

Pebblestep and Poppyfur exited the medicine den and sat beside the SunTree, Pebblestep's eyes were glittering with happiness as her youngest brother was to become an apprentice. Cinderflame and Yarrowtail sat beside their father, all excited. Cloudkit pushed his way through the crowd to stand before the SunTree.

"Cloudkit," Flowerstar began, her eyes glowing. "you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed." She said, Cloudkit's eyes were wide and he struggled to sit still. "From this day forward, until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Cloudpaw." The newly named Cloudpaw's eyes were bright and wide. "One of Dovetail's dying requests was that Dawnfire be Cloudpaw's mentor, not only that but I believe that Dawnfire will be able to teach this young apprentice everything he needs to know about being a warrior of SunClan. Your new mentor, will be Dawnfire."

Dawnfire stood up, feeling the gaze of the entire Clan on her. She moved to stand in front of her new apprentice, she remembered what she did when Sunstream was named her mentor. She also remembered her excitement, now she was feeling what Sunstream felt. Dawnfire leaned forward and touched noses with Cloudpaw. When she stepped back she the utter joy, excitement and eagerness in Cloudpaw's eyes, she would love having him as an apprentice.

"Cloudpaw! Cloudpaw! Cloudpaw!" The Clan cheered on their new apprentice, Dawnfire heard his family the loudest. Rockfur's eyes burned with pride, whilst Yarrowtail, Pebblestep and Cinderflame's eyes glowed with excitement.

"As a final note, just because we have an apprentice now doesn't mean that all of the work should fall onto Cloudpaw, I still want warriors helping out with apprentice duties." Flowerstar added. "We also now have no kits, and no kits on the way, hopefully newleaf

brings us many kits within the next few moons." She dipped her head and jumped down from the SunTree, landing gracefully on the ground.

"Congratulations!" Lionclaw bounded up to Dawnfire. "You've got an apprentice of your own!" He looked at Cloudpaw. "Let me know if she's too mean, I'll put her in her place." He mewed.

Dawnfire swatted him away playfully. "Oh, hush," She laughed then turned to Cloudpaw who was purring with amusement. "Don't listen to him."

"What are we gonna do first?" Cloudpaw asked, his small body trembling with excitement. Dawnfire thought for a moment, her first day as an apprentice was spent collecting moss, but she didn't want to bore her new apprentice's first day.

"How about I show you SunClan territory?" She asked, and judging by the way Cloudpaw lit up, she assumed he was okay with it. "Let's go." She bid farewell to Lionclaw and began leading him to the back entrance.

"Why are we going this way, I thought the entrance was over there?" Cloudpaw motioned to the camp's front entrance.

"This is the back entrance, this leads to the moss hollow and the apprentice den." Dawnfire said. "Two places you'll certainly get used to." She purred and they pushed past the brush to get outside of camp.

"Wow!' Cloudpaw exclaimed running ahead a few mouse lengths. "The forest is *huge*!" He said, turning in circles. "Will I get to see the entire forest?"

"You'll certainly learn SunClan territory," Dawnfire replied, recalling her own excitement at seeing the forest for the first time. "And you will see the Gathering Hollow and the Spirit Woods."

"When is the next gathering?" Cloudpaw asked. "Will I get to go? How many cats will be there?" He was clearly very excited.

Dawnfire purred. "It's not that far off, and if you behave yourself as

an apprentice I don't see why not." She told him, his eyes burned like a blue sun. "And there will be several cats from all four Clans. Anyway, let's go, we can't waste the day away by talking about the Gathering." Cloudpaw nodded and Dawnfire began leading him towards the apprentice den. "This is the apprentice den." She told him.

"Why is outside of camp?" Cloudpaw questioned, his ears twitching with curiosity. "I thought it was supposed to be in camp."

"It used to be, but when I was an apprentice, before you were born, the old apprentice den was flooded and the water turned into mud and hardened, we can no longer use it as a den." Dawnfire explained, she recalled the old den. At least this one had a lot more space.

"I see," Cloudpaw blinked then turned to Dawnfire. "I'm going to be sleeping in here alone aren't I?" He questioned.

"I'm afraid so," Dawnfire felt a pang of sympathy for him. "For a few moons at least, I'm sure we will have some kits born soon and a while after that you'll have some denmates." Cloudpaw would have to be alone for a while, even if a she-cat were expecting kits within the next few days, he would still be alone for at least eight moons. "You will get used to it, though." She purred. "Now let's continue." They moved on across the forest floor, down a gentle hill that led to the Moss Hollow. "This is the moss hollow, we get most of our moss from here. You'll be getting moss for the elders and probably Pebblestep and Poppyfur for a while."

"Boring!" Cloudpaw pouted.

"Yes, it's boring but it's work that must be done. A warrior's life isn't all about fighting, we have to help each other and that means getting moss for elders." Dawnfire laughed slightly. "Be thankful, we have rather kind elders, AshClan's elders have tongues as sharp as claws."

"I suppose." Cloudpaw shrugged.

"We also use the moss hollow to hide the kits and elders if SunClan's

camp is ever attacked, wounded warriors or sick cats would also go here to be safe, and there's always a warrior guarding them." Dawnfire explained.

"Did that ever happen to you as a kit? You having to hide here?" Cloudpaw asked curiously.

"No, it has only happened once in my lifetime. AshClan attacked the camp, but I was an apprentice fighting in the battle. Your siblings were put here though, I hadn't been an apprentice long." *That was when Sunstream died.* Dawnfire remembered her old mentor with a claw of sadness. "Let's go to Jagged Rocks now." Dawnfire and Cloudpaw turned away from the moss hollow and quickly moved through the forest. This part of the territory wasn't as thick as the rest, Jagged Rocks was easy to spot. The red rocks sticking out like teeth from the ground.

"That's Jagged Rocks?" Cloudpaw questioned. "It's so big!" He looked up at Dawnfire. "Cinderflame told me that when you were all apprentices and AshClan patrol attacked you."

Dawnfire nodded. "It was me, Lionclaw, Yarrowtail, Cinderflame, Turtleblaze and Fawnheart, we were all apprentices and we were attacked by almost all of AshClan's warriors led by the former deputy Echoheart."

"Former? Did she die?"

"No," Dawnfire sighed. "That battle I mentioned earlier, she led it without Lionstar's permission, he demoted her from deputy."

"Wow, she must have really messed up." Cloudpaw said.

Dawnfire nodded. "Now, Jagged Rocks is not only dangerous for being so close to the AshClan border, but a clumsy apprentice could break their neck, and in Greenleaf, adders like to come out."

"Adders?" Cloudpaw cocked his head. "Are they bad?"

Dawnfire nodded. "We don't get them much here in SunClan, from what I hear LichenClan get a lot more, but one bite can kill a full grown warrior, not to mention an apprentice or kit."

"Wow." Cloudpaw's eyes looked all over the rocks. "Will I ever have to come here?" He turned his gaze to Dawnfire.

"Probably, it's a good place for herbs. If Pebblestep or Poppyfur are busy, they may send you." Dawnfire explained. "But don't worry, I would come with you." Cloudpaw's gaze lightened. "So what's next?"

"We will probably check out the AshClan border and if it's not too late I'll show you the MoonClan border and other features in the territory." Dawnfire explained, Cloudpaw nodded eagerly and they continued. Cloudpaw bounded next to the AshClan border, asking all sort of questions about the other Clan. Cloudpaw was a very curious cat, and he listened very intently.

Dawnfire couldn't remember a time she had more fun than guiding Cloudpaw around SunClan territory, her worries had vanished for a short time and she felt carefree and happy, almost as if Cloudpaw's energy had rubbed off on her. She would enjoy having him as an apprentice, and knew that he would make a wonderful warrior.

Chapter 25

"Stay low to the ground." Dawnfire commanded her apprentice. Cloudpaw nodded and pressed his belly flat against the forest floor.

"Not that low," Dawnfire mewed. "You want to be able move don't you?" She stood up and moved into the hunting crouch. Her belly fur barely brushing the ground. She looked to the side and watched her apprentice copy her. His form was good, Cloudpaw was good at the crouch, but not the execution of the hunt.

"Now," Dawnfire said. "Watch me." She focused her attention of a small stick and moved forward as she would hunting prey. Her pawsteps were light, and her breaths quiet. Even if it was just a stick, she wanted Cloudpaw to get the entire picture. When Dawnfire got close enough, she lept forward. Her white paws hit the stick, snapping it in two. Dawnfire stood up straight and turned around to see Cloudpaw, his blue eyes were intent and focused.

"Now you try," Dawnfire motioned to another stick. "Try it on that stick." Cloudpaw nodded and dropped to his crouch. His form was decent but he was slightly off balance. As he stepped forward, his pawsteps were somewhat clumsy and he crunched a leaf. He looked up with concern in his eyes. "Don't fret about it too much, losing prey is bad but with luck you can find your prey again, try it again."

Cloudpaw repeated what he did before, but seemed to be taking more care in his steps. Dawnfire watched his moves carefully, finally he jumped onto the twig. His forepaws pushed it slightly forward but he still caught it.

"Much better." Dawnfire praised, brushing her tail across his shoulders. "Now, why don't you go look for actual prey. Sticks don't feed the Clan."

It was quite a while before Cloudpaw caught a piece of prey, but his catch was a fat squirrel that he carried with pride.

"Good job!" Dawnfire purred. "When we get back to camp you can give that to Nightwing and Hawktalon, I know they would appreciate it."

With a mouth full of squirrel, he nodded eagerly. As they headed back to camp Dawnfire spotted another squirrel and caught it for herself. *The more prey the better.* She thought as she carried her kill. Upon entering camp Dawnfire noticed Several cats crowded around Applespots.

Dawnfire and Cloudpaw set their prey down on the fresh-kill pile and Dawnfire went up to Lionclaw, brushing her pelt against his. "What's going on?" She questioned.

"Applespots is expecting my kits." Thornpelt answered before Lionclaw could, his amber eyes burned with a fierce pride. Thornclaw a father? Dawnfire just couldn't see him as the perfect role model for any kit, she remembered how her apprentice training went with a shudder. Would he be any lighter with his own kits?

"That's incredible," Rainears purred. "SunClan needs more kits!"

Cloudpaw pushed his way through the cloud up to Applespots. "You be sure and have to kits soon so I have apprentices to train with!" He said with eager eyes.

"They'll be born as soon as they're ready." Applespots mewed. "But don't worry, when they're old enough you can play with them as long as Dawnfire says it's okay." Applespots moved her green gaze to Dawnfire.

"Of course, if all your duties are finished." Dawnfire purred. Even if they were Thornpelt's new kits were always wonderful. In two moons the nursery would be lively with kits. Dawnfire noticed Thornpelt shooting Cloudpaw a nasty gaze, Dawnfire tensed. *Stay away from my apprentice you fox-heart.* A wave of protectiveness surged through her, she wouldn't let any cat hurt Cloudpaw.

"Everything okay?" Lionclaw asked, his voice like honey.

"Yeah," Dawnfire relaxed. "I'm excited for SunClan to have new kits

in the nursery." She purred. "It will be wonderful for SunClan."

"Very true." Lionclaw purred. "New kits mean new apprentices and new warriors!" He boasted. "Plus, they will be *my* kin, so I know they'll be incredible warriors." Lionclaw puffed out his chest.

"Better than you?" Dawnfire teased, running her tail across his pelt.

"I doubt it," Lionclaw sneered. "I *am* an amazing warrior." Confidence sparked in his amber eyes like a fire.

"You certainly are," Dawnfire touched her nose to his cheek, she breathed in his scent and her blood raced through her body.

"Must you fuel his ego?" A growl came from behind Dawnfire, she turned to see Turtleblaze, Fawnheart and Goldenleaf.

"Still hate me, Turtleblaze?" Lionclaw laughed. "If you don't think I'm the greatest warrior, why don't you challenge me for that title?"

Turtleblaze laughed. "Being a warrior is more than fighting, it's hunting as well." He countered Lionblaze's argument.

"And I'll beat you at that too." Lionclaw laughed, tail twitching. For a moment Dawnfire was nervous, then she saw a playful gleam in both Turtleblaze's and Lionclaw's eyes. They were just teasing each other.

"You know what, Lionclaw." Turtleblaze mewed with a sneer. "I'll take you up on that challenge some day."

"Oh really?" Lionclaw laughed. "Why not right now?" He questioned.

"I'm about to go on patrol, but how about before the gathering tomorrow night? We can go the training area and have a mock fight, then we can see who catches the most prey. These three lovely she-cats will judge the battle, and we will even practice a team fight. Fawnheart will be your partner and Goldenleaf will be mine."

"Why not me?" Dawnfire stepped forward.

"You would go easy on both of them." Fawnheart said, twitching her tail. "Turtleblaze is your brother and Lionclaw is your mate. Plus, you fight well with both of them, you know the other's moves."

Dawnfire's tail drooped slightly. "I suppose," She said. "I guess that makes me a fair judge though."

"That's true." Goldenleaf put in.

"But wait," Lionclaw said. "Fawnheart is your mate and Goldenleaf is my sister. Won't they go easy on the two of us."

Turtleblaze and Fawnheart mates? Dawnfire questioned, she supposed that two were very close, but Dawnfire still didn't like Fawnheart.

"Oh please," Goldenleaf laughed. "Did I ever go easy on you when we were kits? That's not gonna change now." Her green eyes flashed with confidence and for a moment, both her and Lionclaw looked like the same cat. Dawnfire purred at how similar they were. Dawnfire didn't look much like Turtleblaze nor did they act the same. Turtleblaze was relaxed and calm whereas Dawnfire could be a lot more brash and emotional.

"And I was trained to never go easy on an opponent." Fawnheart said with a edge to her voice. "Even if he is my mate."

"You're not easy on me any other time anyway." Turtleblaze said, somewhat exasperated. "Feisty she-cat."

Fawnheart hissed, but it was playful. "And don't you forget it." Her purr was sharp, yet lovingly towards Turtleblaze.

"What do I have to do to get that kind of love from you, Fawnheart?" Dawnfire joked, moving closer to the pale brown she-cat. Fawnheart jumped away from her with a hiss, there wasn't anger or hatred, just annoyance. *Better than how she used to look at me.* Dawnfire mewed to herself. "You know, " Dawnfire added. "One of these days you're gonna have to learn to like me, you're mates with my brother after all. Turtleblaze did it for me."

"Hey now," Turtleblaze stopped her. "I never said I *liked* Lionclaw, I tolerate his arrogance."

"I feel the love." Lionclaw joked. "You know deep down inside you truly care about me Turtleblaze." He laughed.

Turtleblaze snorted and stuck his nose in the air. "Yeah, right." He suddenly jumped with Thornpelt spat his name, calling him to the patrol. "I gotta go," Turtleblaze mewed, he touched noses with Fawnheart before running off to the join his patrol. Fawnheart and Goldenleaf also left Lionclaw and Dawnfire alone, with Goldenleaf saying she had to go hunting, and Fawnheart followed her. Dawnfire turned to Lionclaw.

"You really gonna fight my brother?" Dawnfire asked, a slight laugh in her mew.

"Don't worry," Lionclaw laughed. "I won't hurt him too badly." He intertwined his tail with hers, and looked into her eyes. Dawnfire felt her heart speed up, she gazed into his amber eyes. "That would make you mad, and I wouldn't want that." He touched his nose to hers. Dawnfire closed her eyes and felt Lionclaw's warmth all around her, her heart pounding in her chest. As long as she had Lionclaw, everything would be okay.

Chapter 26

"We're here," Turtleblaze mewed, he had Fawnheart beside him and Goldenleaf was behind them.

"Hope you're ready." Lionclaw laughed, twitching his tail confidently. Dawnfire sat next to a tree, it's where she normally when training Cloudpaw.

"I hope you are," Turtleblaze laughed, Goldenleaf moved over to sit beside Dawnfire and Fawnheart sat on Goldenleaf's other side.

"So, we will fight just me and you first," Lionclaw first. "Then Goldenleaf and Fawnheart will join in."

"That's the plan," Turtleblaze stretched, extending his claws slightly before putting them away. "And remember, claws sheathed."

Lionclaw nodded. "Of course." He mewed confidently. The two tom cats faced each other in battle stance while the she-cats watched intently. There was a heartbeat's moment of silence and anticipation. "Now!" Lionclaw was like a streak of lightning, his golden body shot into Turtleblaze's taking him to the ground. Turtleblaze let out a cry of alarm as he hit the sandy floor, the impact sending up a small cloud.

Turtleblaze struggled out from under Lionclaw's body and battered at his head with one forepaw, Lionclaw was back on his paws quickly and swiped at Turtleblaze's feet who stumbled backwards. Lionclaw swiftly moved closer to Turtleblaze, their pelts brushing. Lionclaw used his bodyweight to knock Turtleblaze off balance, Lionclaw lashed out a forepaw and toppled the brown warrior completely. Turtleblaze recovered quickly but Lionclaw had planned for that, he nimbly moved out of range of Turtleblaze's attack and recoiled with a paw to Turtleblaze's shoulder.

Dawnfire was interested in the fight, she had seen Lionclaw fight before, but she had also been fighting and never payed much

attention to his technique. His movements were quick, not exactly precise but damaging. He had quick reflexes and showed no signs of fear, then against this was just against Turtleblaze.

Turtleblaze's attack style was much different. He was relaxed, and his eyes focused. He was much more calculated than Lionclaw and his attacks on point and neat. However, he was against an opponent that was quick, Turtleblaze might not have all the time to plan his moves that he needed.

As the thought crossed Dawnfire's mind, Turtleblaze*'s* body hit the ground, he let out a groan of pain on impact. Lionclaw towered over him and pinned him in place. Turtleblaze struggled for a few heartbeats before relaxing. "Alright you win the fight." He sighed heavily. Lionclaw let out a sharp noise of triumph and released Turtleblaze. The mottled tom rose from the ground and shook sand from his pelt. "You won't be me at hunting."

Lionclaw puffed out his chest. "We'll just have to see." He sneered.

Turtleblaze shook his head gently. "You go near the AshClan border and I'll take the MoonClan border." He mewed. "They will decide to bring us back," He motioned to the three she-cats who were spectating. "Whoever has the most fresh-kill wins." Lionclaw nodded and the two of them vanished in different directions and the hunt was on. Goldenleaf and Fawnheart conversed quietly together while Dawnfire stared off in the direction Lionclaw had headed. She wondered who would catch more prey, she was excited to see the result.

This whole contest had been relaxing to her, it was a nice change of pace from everything that had been going on, and they weren't wasting time cause both Lionclaw and Turtleblaze would bring back plenty of prey.

"We should bring them back," Goldenleaf said after a while had passed. "You two go fetch them, I'll wait here." Dawnfire and Fawnheart nodded and Dawnfire hurried into the forest. She picked up Lionclaw's scent easily and tracked it. Lionclaw had covered a lot of ground, she jumped onto a log and narrowed her eyes, looking for his golden pelt. Her ears twitched as she heard rustling

in the brush not far behind her. She jumped off the log and followed the sound, sure enough she found Lionclaw with fresh-kill at his paws.

"Hi there." Lionclaw purred when he saw her. "Is it time to come back?" He questioned. Dawnfire nodded.

"Can you help me gather the prey I caught?" He asked. Dawnfire agreed and they went back to pick up his prey. In the end Lionclaw had caught two squirrels, a vole and a mouse.

"Nice catch." Dawnfire praised as she took the mouse and vole in her jaws.

"Thanks," Lionclaw's eyes glowed with confidence. Dawnfire's chest felt warm as she watched him. They started back through the forest, Dawnfire was eager to see what Turtleblaze caught. They returned to the training hollow where Turtleblaze sat proudly over a pile of fresh-kill. In his pile he had three mice and two voles.

Goldenleaf took a look at both piles then to everyone else. "Turtleblaze wins the hunting with one more piece than Lionclaw."

Turtleblaze's eyes sparked with confidence, he looked at Lionclaw. "Told you I would win the hunting." He said, actually sounding cocky.

Lionclaw snorted. "You may have caught more but my prey is bigger, but I suppose I could give you the victory." His eyes were filled with pure arrogance.

"You arrogant furball!" Turtleblaze was on his paws, pelt bristling. "Just admit that you lost."

"I didn't lose," Lionclaw said, voice calm and even. "It was a tie. No one won and no one lost." He flicked his tail.

Turtleblaze hissed. "I should've known it would end like this. Even if I won both the fighting and hunting you wouldn't accept defeat." He looked Dawnfire dead in the eyes. "You might wanna consider a different mate, someone other than this arrogant piece of fox-dung." He spat before turning and picking up his prey, with a toxic look

from Fawnheart who helped him. The two stormed into the forest back to camp. Leaving Dawnfire, Goldenleaf and Lionclaw.

Dawnfire heard a heavy sigh from Lionclaw, he looked at her with guilt in his eyes. "I'm sorry Dawnfire, I didn't think he would blow up like that."

"it's fine," Dawnfire honestly felt hurt by her brother's remark. Turtleblaze was normally so calm, getting yelled at by him was painful. She had hoped this contest would bring Turtleblaze and Lionclaw closer but instead Turtleblaze hated Lionclaw even more. Dawnfire sighed.

"You might wanna fix that at some point." Goldenleaf said, touching her tail to her brother's flank. "You don't need a rivalry with him."

"I don't think he'll listen to me just yet." Lionclaw shrugged. "But I'll try later," He looked into Dawnfire's eyes. "For you." Dawnfire felt a purr rise in her chest.

"We should get back to camp," Goldenleaf looked up at the sky, the full moon was beginning to rise. The other two cats agreed and began heading back as well. Dawnfire pressed close to Lionclaw as she always did.

When they got back in camp Dawnfire noticed the Clan gathering around Flowerstar as they prepared to leave. Dawnfire was greeted by Cloudpaw, his blue eyes wide and and eager.

"Dawnfire, I did everything you asked. I collected a whole bunch of moss, changed Hawktalon's and Nightwing's nests as well and Applespots' and gave the rest to Poppyfur."

"How much moss did you collect?" Lionclaw chuckled.

"A lot." Cloudpaw boasted. "More moss than Poppyfur knew what to do with, I had to have Pebblestep help me carry it back."

"But did you do a good job?" Dawnfire questioned. Cloudpaw tensed.

"I uh, I think so." Cloudpaw suddenly seemed to doubt himself.

Dawnfire let out a slight purr and padded over to Hawktalon and Nightwing.

"Hello, Dawnfire." Hawktalon greeted with a gentle purr.

"Hello," Dawnfire dipped her head respectfully to the two elders. "I just wanted to see if Cloudpaw did a good job on your nests.

"He absolutely did." Nightwing mewed kindly. "Very soft and comfortable. I haven't had a nest this comfortable since you were an apprentice, Dawnfire."

Dawnfire's ears twitched at the compliment. "Well it seems that he's learned well." She turned to her apprentice, his eyes sparkling. "As promised, you can go to the Gathering Cloudpaw.

Cloudpaw let out a squeak of excitement. "Thank you so much, Dawnfire!" His paws twitched with excitement.

"You're turning into quite the mentor." Hawktalon mewed. "Making him work hard to get what he really wants.

"He's very enthusiastic." Dawnfire rested her tail on Cloudpaw's shoulders. "But he listens well."

SunClan and AshClan were the last two Clans to arrive in the Gathering hollow, Dawnfire couldn't help but notice the fierce glares from the MoonClan cats.

"Is MoonClan angry with us?" Cloudpaw asked, clearly catching the hostile glares.

"Probably," Lionclaw answered. "But it hasn't been that long since the fight, any Clan would feel hostile towards the other."

Dawnfire nodded and looked around for the silver pelt of her friend. She scanned over the AshClan cats but saw no sign of Silvermoon. Dawnfire let out a sigh, she wanted to share the news of her new apprentice with the AshClan cat, but she figured Silvermoon wasn't here.

Dawnfire told Cloudpaw he could talk to some other apprentices as

long as he didn't cause any trouble or talk too much about SunClan. She found him talking with a brown tom, Dawnfire recognized him as Timberpaw of LichenClan. She let out a purr, glad he was getting along with other apprentices.

As the leaders began leaping into their respective trees, Dawnfire took her spot beside Lionclaw. Sandfoot sat on her other side, resting her tail over her ginger paws. Dawnfire looked over at Cloudpaw, he had sat down with the apprentice and was now watching eagerly. Dawnfire turned her gaze to the tree where the four leaders sat.

"I would like to begin," Lionstar stepped forward, Dawnfire was relieved to see him better, his voice was as bold as ever. "If the other Clans don't mind." The other leaders nodded. "AshClan doesn't have much news to report but Lilyclaw has given birth to three wonderful kits, Skykit, Puddlekit and Ravenkit." The Clans shared a warm murmur, kits were always a good sign. "Newleaf has brought plentiful amounts of prey for AshClan and we remain strong."

Lionstar dipped his head and Jaggedstar stood up. "LichenClan welcomes a new warrior, Haresong!" Two dark tom's puffed out their chest as the four Clans cheered. "Prey is prosperous and LichenClan is thriving." The next leader to stand was Flowerstar.

"SunClan proudly welcomes Heatherflight, Brackenpelt and Flamepetal as warriors." She announced, the three new warriors with the exception of Flamepetal, who ducked her head slightly, sat proudly. "We also welcome Cloudpaw as our newest apprentice." Dawnfire looked over at her apprentice, he seemed to be struggling to sit still. "We also welcome Applespots into the nursery." Flowerstar seemed to be glowing with pride for her Clan.

"My turn," Shadowstar stood up before Flowerstar had a chance to sit down or say anything else.

"That was rude." Dawnfire heard Snowtail whisper to Icepteal. Dawnfire agreed, it was quite rude. Was MoonClan still that mad?

"Earlier this moon," Shadowstar began. "SunClan came into our territory requesting we build a barrier around the river to prevent

flooding..." The black leader shot a glare at Flowerstar. "While in our territory SunClan stole prey!"

An uproar broke out from the SunClan cats. "SunClan stole no prey!" Thornpelt hissed.

"That's not all," Shadowstar spoke over the noise. "When confronted we met with a battle, and SunClan *killed* Tawnytail!"

Dawnfire gasped, along with the other Clans. Tawnytail...died? She was alive when they battle ended! Dawnfire recalled how Tawnytail had to be carried away by her Clanmates. Thornpelt digging his claws into her then violently throwing her over the river. It was Thornpelt who killed her.

"You never should have picked a fight with us," Flowerstar growled. "SunClan didn't steal a single hair from prey in your territory. We have more respect for other Clans that that." She hissed. "The only cats who were there were Dawnfire, Thornpelt and Brackenpelt as an apprentice, and none of us broke away from the group."

"Then explain the dead prey reeking of SunClan!" Ebonywing spat from the crowd.

"Clearly whoever found it doesn't know SunClan scent from their own!" Thornpelt growled at the black she-cat.

"No," Pigeonpelt retorted. "SunClan is nothing but a bunch of thieves."

Thornpelt jumped up. "Say that to my face mange-pelt!"

"Thornpelt!" Flowerstar shouted. "I will not break this truce nor will I let my warriors because of MoonClan's ignorance." She turned her gaze sharply onto Shadowstar. "I suggest you carry on with your news before we ruin this for the rest of the Clans."

Shadowstar let out a low growl before turning away from the SunClan leader. "Violetfur has taken the place of Tawnytail as deputy, and in honor of her mother we welcome Mosswind as a warrior." The other three Clans cheered but it wasn't as enthusiastic. The fight between MoonClan and SunClan had clearly made

LichenClan and AshClan uncomfortable. Dawnfire felt a pang of sympathy for Mosswind, Dawnfire knew what it was like to become a warrior in the wake of her parents' death.

"That's all I have to say." Without another word Shadowstar jumped from his tree. "MoonClan we're leaving!" He shouted and led his Clan out of the hollow. Dawnfire notice Flowerstar sigh, then jump down from her tree as well. "SunClan might as well leave too," She said, she looked at the other two leaders who shared an uneasy look. "I apologize for what happened tonight." Flowerstar said before gathering up her Clan and leading them home.

Chapter 27

Dawnfire's paws hit the mouse dead on, quickly killing her prey. She sat up and buried her fresh-kill quickly, she looked around for Cloudpaw but no sign of his gray and white pelt. Dawnfire stood and moved through the undergrowth, green eyes peeled for her apprentice. The only cat she did spot was Redclaw who had a squirrel in his jaws. He met Dawnfire's gaze and dropped his prey.

"How's your hunt going?" He questioned with a twitch of his whiskers.

"Good," Dawnfire dipped her head. "Just looking for Cloudpaw," She said, looking around once more.

"I think I saw him over by the AshClan border. " Redclaw answered. "He didn't notice me though, he was pretty focused."

Dawnfire dipped her head, "Thank you, Redclaw. I think I'm gonna go get him." The ginger tom dipped his head, grabbed his prey and hopped away into the forest. Dawnfire also turned, heading towards the AshClan border. She soon saw the border through the trees as well as her apprentice. Cloudpaw was crouched, stalking a piece of prey that was out of Dawnfire's sights. She watched him closesly, his form had gotten a lot better and Redclaw was right, he was very focused. Movement caught Dawnfire's gaze away from the young tom, she spotted another silver pelt. This one with dull green eyes on a face marked with scars. *Echoheart!* Dawnfire tensed as she watched the AshClan she-cat, her eyes were set on Cloudpaw, and her gaze filled with malice. Dawnfire looked quickly towards to Cloudpaw, he was nearing the AshClan border, he waggled his haunches as he prepared to pouch, Echoheart also prepared to attack.

"Cloudpaw!" Dawnfire burst from the brush, the same time that both of them moved forward, only Cloudpaw stumbled and fell just short of the border. He sat up and shook the dirt from his fur,

Dawnfire noticed he looked up and saw Echoheart, causing him to jump backwards with alarm. He looked over his shoulder at Dawnfire.

"Dawnfire?" He said. "What are you doing here?" He questioned, looking between Echoheart and Dawnfire. "Who is this?"

"My name is Echoheart," Her voice was sharp with annoyance.

"She's an AshClan cat," Dawnfire stepped forward, standing protectively beside her apprentice.

"Oh, cool!" Cloudpaw perked up, looking at her with excitement, Dawnfire knew he had an interest in the other Clans.

"She's not a nice AshClan cat," Dawnfire added with a growl.

Echoheart's eyes faked hurt, "Now that's not very fair, Dawnfire." She purred. "You won't even give him a chance to get to know me."

"You could care less about getting to know him," Dawnfire retorted. "You were getting ready to attack him." Cloudpaw tensed beside Dawnfire, he hadn't been aware.

"Only if he would've crossed my border," Echoheart lashed her tail. "Which," She turned her cruel gaze on Cloudpaw. "You almost did."

Cloudpaw's ears flattened and he took a step back. "I- I didn't mean to," He stuttered. "I didn't notice,"

"Maybe your mentor should teach you how to smell AshClan from SunClan," Echoheart looked back at Dawnfire. "Although it's amazing she can teach you anything."

Dawnfire's claws dug into the earth. "Don't you have somewhere to be, Echoheart. Instead of lurking around our border?"

"I'm free to do whatever I want in my own territory thank you very much," Echoheart hissed. "As well as any cats who stray into it." Her tone darkened and her eyes glanced at Cloudpaw for a heartbeat.

Dawnfire hated her arrogance, and there was something else in her

eyes. Something in the murky green depths that filled Dawnfire with unease. "Stay away from my apprentice, Echoheart." Dawnfire growled sternly. She wasn't scared of Echoheart the same way she was scared of Thornpelt, maybe it was the fact that Echoheart was in AshClan.

"You think you're so big and bad now, don't you, Dawnfire." Echoheart sneered. "I remember when you were a bumbling apprentice, you were an idiot then and you're an idiot now. Just bigger and with an apprentice." Her gazed became shadowed and frigid. "You won't last long." Dawnfire sensed a heavy threat.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Dawnfire demanded, taking a step closer to the border, claws unsheathing.

"Don't cross that border, Dawnfire." Echoheart's claws extended as well. "I've almost killed you twice now, I won't fail again."

"Killing a warrior is against the warrior code!" Cloudpaw piped up, he stood boldly but his eyes trembled.

"Brave kitty," Echoheart laughed then tucked her claws away. "Watch your back, Dawnfire. I may not be able to cross your border, but I know another cat who doesn't need to." Without another word, Echoheart turned and vanished into her territory.

"She really is mean," Cloudpaw said, his voice shook slightly. "I'm glad you stopped me from crossing the border! She would've turned me into crowfood."

Dawnfire let out a sigh. "She's a very tempered cat, but I wouldn't have let that happen." She touched her tail to his flank. "Gather your prey and we can head back to camp." Cloudpaw gave an excited nod and went to find his other prey. As they headed back to camp, Dawnfire couldn't help but go over Echoheart's words over and over in her head: *Watch your back, Dawnfire. I may not be able to cross your border, but I know another cat who doesn't need to.* The malevolence in her eyes sent chills along Dawnfire's spine, she didn't know what the AshClan she-cat was talking about, but it scared her.

Dusk was upon the forest and the cats of SunClan were settling down for the night. Applespots and Thornpelt were sharing food outside the nursery, Flowerstar and Stormwind were laughing together outside the SunTree, Bramblepelt sat with Willownose and Fawnheart as the family talked together, Dawnfire heard pawsteps and turned to see Pebblestep padding towards her.

"Hello, Pebblestep." Dawnfire dipped her head at the medicine cat. "How are you?"

"I'm doing fine, Dawnfire." Pebblestep purred softly. "But, Poppyfur's got me up to my neck in chores. "I need to get the elders ticks, collect some herbs, sort them and throw old ones out."

Dawnfire purred with amusement. "Well, I can go gather some herbs and lend you Cloudpaw to help with the cleaning and tick removing."

"I normally do the ticks, mouse bile doesn't bother me since I have no sense of smell. So.."

Dawnfire cut her off. "Don't worry about, Pebblestep." He needs time to work with the elders. Take him and work him, he almost got shredded by Echoheart today."

"Is he okay?" Pebblestep's eyes showed concern.

"Yeah, I stopped him before he got hurt, but seriously; he will help you and I'll go gather herbs." Dawnfire offered once more.

"Are you sure?" Dawnfire nodded and Pebblestep sighed with relief. "Thank you, Dawnfire. It really means a lot." Pebblestep dipped her head. "We only need marigold and yarrow, and you know where that grows."

Dawnfire nodded, looked like she was heading towards Jagged Rocks, but it wouldn't be too bad. Those herbs grow more towards the bottom. "I'll be back as soon as possible." Dawnfire promised and padded out of camp. Dawnfire liked working alone, she could move at her own pace and run through the forest. She crossed through the thick trees and into the clearing where Jagged Rocks

rose up out of the distance. Feeling safe and relaxed, Dawnfire bounded over to the rocks and worked on finding the herbs.

Dawnfire had a pile of marigold and yarrow building and was lost in her own thoughts, it wasn't until someone spoke her name that she realized she wasn't alone. Dawnfire spun around on her paws and saw Thornpelt. The fur on her spine raised and she planted her paws.

"Hello, Thornpelt." She greeted, trying not to show her fear. "What are you doing out here?" She questioned.

"Hunting." He said, twitching his tail.

Dawnfire shifted her paws. "Hunting really isn't good around here, you know this." She said, meeting his dark amber gaze.

"Who said I was hunting prey?" Thornpelt extended his razor sharp claws, Dawnfire took a step back. "You let your guard down so easily, Dawnfire."

Dawnfire extended her own claws. "Back off, Thornpelt." She growled, voice shaking slightly.

"Or what, Dawnfire?" He moved closed. "There's no other cats out here but us, I will return to camp distraught and claim that I found you dead on the Jagged Rocks, with silver fur in your claws. Echoheart had killed you; such a disgraceful warrior. Then the clan with mourn the loss of a brave warrior, and my biggest threat will be gone."

"Your plan won't work, Thornpelt." Dawnfire hissed. "There will always be a cat who will defy you, once I am dead Lionclaw, Turtleblaze and all of my friends will suspect you and get you thrown out of SunClan."

"Not if I kill Flowerstar and become leader. " His eyes sparked. "Then I will kill each and everyone of those cats; any cat who defies me will die."

Dawnfire stared him down, she honestly didn't think she could fight him. He overpowered her and was much bigger, not to mention

more experienced fighter and he was fighting to kill. Dawnfire had to run and she had to get back to camp. Dawnfire looked around, Thornpelt blocked her way, but she could get around him if she was fast enough.

Dawnfire took a deep breath and shot forward as fast as she could, avoiding Thornpelt. He spun and slashed at her, narrowly missing. She could feel his claws on her fur but he did not damage her. Channeling all of her speed and energy, Dawnfire ran. He paws pounded the ground beneath her, kicking up dirt and grass. She heard Thornpelt run after her, but she was faster. She passed the Moss Hollow and skidded to a stop just before camp when she saw Flowerstar, who looked at her in shock.

"Dawnfire? Are you okay?" The leader hurried to her side. "Why were you running like that?" Dawnfire turned and saw Thornpelt casually stroll up behind her. "Yes, Dawnfire? Why were you running like that?" Dawnfire panted, looking from Flowerstar to Thornpelt, he didn't look winded at all. She clenched her teeth.

"I thought I saw cats on the border." She lied painfully. Flowerstar wouldn't believe her, she just shook her head. "I was wrong."

Flowerstar gave her a confused look but then turned to Thornpelt. "Shouldn't you be organizing patrols?"

Thornpelt dipped his head. "Of course, Flowerstar." Thornpelt pushed past Dawnfire and went into the camp, Dawnfire stared at her paws.

"I don't know why you're lying to me, Dawnfire." Flowerstar said, her pale eyes glinting with annoyance. "But I do not appreciate it, you're a warrior, start acting like it." Flowerstar turned away, her insult stung like a thorn in her heart. Dawnfire groaned and turned to get the herbs she left behind. There was no sign of Thornpelt this time; and Dawnfire was on edge. By the time she got back to camp the sun was starting to set. Dawnfire apologized for taking so long and dropped the herbs off at the medicine den. Her muscles were sore and her spirit very low, Dawnfire just wanted sleep.

In the warriors den she took her nest and tried to sleep, she

struggled to find it until she scented Lionclaw enter the den as well. She didn't open her eyes but she felt him lay beside her, his warmth spreading throughout her body. His tongue rasped over her ears and for a moment she felt like a kit again; falling into a deep, much needed sleep.

Chapter 28

"New kits! New kits!" Cloudpaw bounded around, his blue eyes glowing excitedly. "I won't be alone as an apprentice anymore!"

Dawnfire purred with amusement. "You've been an apprentice for almost two moons now, I'm not sure you'll be training with Squirrletail's kits. Applespot's kits maybe, but you've got to wait quite a while before they will be ready." Squirrletail had just announced that she was currently expecting Brackenclaw's kits. Both cats were rather young, but the Clan was very excited for new kits, not only was Applespots ready to have her kits soon; but now Squirrletail would be after her. SunClan would be blossoming with new life, just as Newleaf always brought. Dawnfire wondered how many more kits this season would bring.

"I hope I don't spend my entire apprenticeship alone." Cloudpaw twitched his ears. "That den is boring, and empty all the time."

Dawnfire brushed his pelt with her tail, she felt sorry for the poor cat. Even if Dovetail would have survived, Cloudpaw's littermates didn't survive, she always had Turtleblaze to train with, and even they weren't the only apprentices. For a while, Heatherflight and her siblings stayed in the apprentice den with him; but the warriors den was soon expanded to allow them. Now Cloudpaw slept alone; Dawnfire wished he didn't have to but nothing would change until he became a warrior, and he wasn't ready for that just yet.

Dawnfire touched her tail to Cloudpaw's pelt. "We should go hunting, prey is bound to be running well today." She purred and led her apprentice out of the camp, she felt very uneasy every time she left the camp. Her encounter with Thornpelt had left her terrified to be anywhere except camp. Patrols she's was fine, but even with Cloudpaw she was still uneasy. Dawnfire kept away from the AshClan border in case Echoheart decided to jump her, it was clear that the cat Echoheart had mentioned before was Thornpelt. It was obvious that the two of them were working together to

overthrow Flowerstar and kill any cats who got in their way, one of which was Dawnfire.

Dawnfire needed a way to stop them before they succeeded, that was what Dawnfire feared more than anything, there had to be a way to stop them. Tell Poppyfur maybe..?

"Dawnfire!" Dawnfire's mind was snapped back into reality as her paw caught on an uplifted root, she let out a cry of pain and hit the forest floor. She opened her eyes and saw Cloudpaw staring down at her, confusion in his eyes. "Are you okay?" He questioned.

Dawnfire nodded and stood, shaking the dead leaves from her fur. She tested her paw tentatively on the ground, it was sore but not damaged. "Just not paying attention right now, I'm sorry Cloudpaw." Her pelt burned slightly but she cleaned herself up. "Let's get to hunting, if I didn't scare everything off." She purred with amusement, trying to brush off what she did. Cloudpaw's eyes sparkled and he sniffed the air; instantly looking for any prey. Dawnfire enjoyed watching Cloudpaw hunt, he was very observant and very good at finding prey. He turned in one direction and dropped low to the ground.

The only issue he had were the white sections of his fur that stuck out in the thick forest, like a single snowflake resting on tree bark. Dawnfire struggled with that, he was very easy to spot and not easy to hide. She watched his every move, his pawsteps were light and his movements slow. She searched for what he was stalking and spotted the tiny body of a brown mouse. Cloudpaw seemed to be trying to hide himself in the shadows to turn his white pelt into gray. The mouse seemed rather oblivious to Cloudpaw's presence, until he shot forward to make the kill. The mouse started to dart away, but Cloudpaw was faster.

As his claws met the mouse, his paws skidded on loose, damp leaves and his body hit the ground with a thud and light splatter as he landed in a patch of mud. The mouse was dead, and Cloudpaw was covered in mud. He stood up and wrinkled his nose, Dawnfire let out a purr of amusement. His entire lower half was covered in wet mud, his thick fur stuck out in all directions and his ears flat on his head.

"You alright?" Dawnfire fought back her amusement. Cloudpaw shook a paw, flecking mud onto the forest floor.

"Yeah," He snorted. "At least I caught the stupid thing." He grumbled and stood up, lapping the mud off his pelt and making a face as he did so.

Dawnfire thought for a moment, then got an idea. "You know, maybe that mud isn't a bad idea." She twitched her ears. 'I've heard that Snowtail and Icepetal will cover themselves in mud in order to hide their scent and white pelts."

"Really?" Cloudpaw tilted his head. He looked over his mud-coated pelt for a moment then back up to Dawnfire. "I could try it..." Cloudpaw looked at the mud and dropped his body into it, rolling around and coating himself almost entirely with mud. He stood up and Dawnfire couldn't help but laugh, his fur was now clumped with wet mud and he looked half his normal size.

Dawnfire purred with amusement. "I'm sure you don't have to wear that much mud, just enough to hide your pelt."

"Right..." Cloudpaw twitched his whiskers and shook off some of the mud.

"Now let's try some more hunting." Dawnfire sniffed the air, searching for any scent of prey; Cloudpaw caught the scent of squirrel before she did and went after his kill. Dawnfire decided to search for her own fresh-kill. She caught scent of a mouse and quickly caught it, she buried her catch then turned to find her apprentice. Dawnfire peeled her eyes for him, but was unable to spot him.

She felt a sudden weight on her back, sending shock through her entire body. Dawnfire was instantly on alarm and her instincts kicked in, she through her attacker to the ground; unsheathed her claws and was ready to face Thornpelt. Instead, she realized her white paws were now stained brown and her attacker was much lighter than Thornpelt. Cloudpaw lie on his back, blue eyes wide with shock.

"Oh, Cloudpaw." She let out a shaky sigh. "You scared me."

Cloudpaw scrambled to his paws and puffed out his chest. "I can see that! This mud really did help! You didn't even see me coming!" He flicked his tail confidently.

Dawnfire purred, glad he wasn't asking questions about why she acted so harshly. "It was a very good sneak attack." She praised her apprentice and they continued their hunt. Dawnfire had been right, they prey had been running well. Cloudpaw caught another mouse and Dawnfire caught a mouse and a squirrel, they returned to camp and Dawnfire commanded her apprentice to feed the elders and Applespots.

By the time they returned the mud had pretty much faded from Cloudpaw's coat and now just looked like he had rolled in sand, Dawnfire got her own piece of fresh-kill and sat by the Drinking Pool which cats were finally allowed back around now that the rain and snow were gone. She rested her tail across her paws and leaned down to enjoy her prey. Thornpelt was nowhere in sight, probably on patrol; and she felt peaceful. Poppyfur was in a deep conversation with Flowerstar while Pebblestep sorted herbs. Applespots was laughing along with Squirreltail, clearly welcoming the new queen into the nursery. Dawnfire couldn't help but notice Fawnheart sitting at the warrior's den with her pale eyes resting on the two queens.

There was something in her eyes, was it jealousy? Dawnfire shook her head, it didn't look envious. Almost...nervous. Dawnfire shook her head and turned her head to the entrance of camp as she heard cats approaching. She had been right in assuming that Thornpelt was on a patrol as he headed into camp followed by Turtleblaze, Lionclaw, Rainears and Sandfoot. Thornpelt instantly went to Flowerstar's side and Lionclaw came to join Dawnfire.

"How was the patrol?" Dawnfire greeted with a purr.

"Pretty good, but there were some heavy scents around the AshClan border." Lionclaw flicked his ears and sat beside her. "Pretty sure it was Echoheart."

The fur on Dawnfire's spine stood on end. "How can you be sure?"

"I don't trust that cat farther than I can throw the SunTree," He snorted. "She's up to something; all she does at gatherings is glare at you or Flowerstar. She gives me the creeps."

Dawnfire nodded. "I agree," She looked at her paws. "She's up to no good, I can tell."

Lionclaw yawned and stretched. "Well, I don't wanna worry about that now." He brushed his tail across Dawnfire's side. "I've been on my paws since dawn," He leaned slightly into her. "I'm ready to get some sleep."

Dawnfire touched her muzzle to his shoulder. "You head to the den, I'll join you shortly. I'm gonna make sure Cloudpaw did everything he was supposed to." Lionclaw nodded, his amber eyes clouded with exhaustion and he trudged on towards the warrior's den. Dawnfire stood up and tracked down Cloudpaw as he was exiting the nursery. Applespots and Squirreltail had retreated inside.

Dawnfire dipped her head at him. "Did you do everything?" Cloudpaw nodded. "Good, now eat something and get some sleep. You did really good today." She touched her muzzled to his nose and dismissed him. Dawnfire walked slowly to the warriors den, meeting Thornpelt's gaze on the way. It cut into her, sharper than his claws ever could. Dawnfire sighed quietly and entered the den, trying to shut out her fears and just get some sleep.

Chapter 29

The camp was filled with joy and hope, cheerful murmers spread from cat to cat, everything felt even warmer under the early greenleaf sun. Applespots had given birth to Cherrykit, Briarkit and Thrushkit. Cherrykit was a beautiful tortishell like her mother, Briarkit had thick, ginger fur and bright eyes, and Thrushkit looked exactly like his father. Pale brown with fierce amber eyes. Dawnfire looked at Cherrykit and Briarkit with joy, but couldn't help but feel a prickle of unease each time she met Thrushkit's tiny gaze, she knew she shouldn't judge him based off Thornpelt; but they just looked so similar. Dawnfire was worried that Thornpelt would teach his children to be as ruthless as he was, but then again they also had Applespots for a mother. She was probably one of the kindest cats in the entire Clan, she would keep them on the right path.

Dawnfire sat near the warriors den, watching as Cloudpaw brought Applespots a mouse to eat, her kits were barely two days old; but Cloudpaw wanted to play with them. Dawnfire knew that Cloudpaw would be very helpful to them as well as Squirreltail's when the time came. The ginger queen had a large round belly and was sunning herself outside the nursery. Soon the camp would be alive with the sound of kits, and six moons later; alive with new apprentices training to be warriors. Everything in SunClan was going wonderfully, but Dawnfire couldn't help but worry what was really on the horizon. Thornpelt was planning something, and it was only a matter of time before he acted. Dawnfire was trying very hard to hide her fears from the rest of the Clan, but she avoided Thornpelt like greencough, and she was worried that cats were starting to notice.

There were three cats who seemed to be paying particularly close attention, Flowerstar, Poppyfur and Lionclaw. Flowerstar gave her sharp looks every time she offered to be an a patrol that didn't have Thornpelt, and Poppyfur seemed suspicious ever since Thornpelt had nearly attacked Dawnfire over a moon ago. Lionclaw had asked

a couple times, why should be staring at Thurshkit or tense every time Thornpelt came close; and Dawnfire couldn't come up with a good enough excuse, so she just shrugged it off. She knew he was concerned, but she just couldn't tell him the truth; not yet.

Dawnfire focused as her brother padded up to her, there was something in his green eyes that she couldn't identify. "Hi, Turtleblaze." She greeted with a flick of her tail.

"Hi," She shifted his paws. "Want to go hunting with me?" He questioned with a light tone to his voice. Dawnfire nodded happily, it had been forever since Turtleblaze asked her to do something with just him. Dawnfire stood up and stood beside her brother.

"Of course, sounds like fun." Dawnfire purred. Turtleblaze gave a small nod and the two of them exited camp together. They kept a steady pace, bounding through the forest. Dawnfire suddenly felt like an apprentice again; running through the forest with her brother without a care in the world. Turtleblaze didn't stop running until they reached the river, he looked across it over towards the Gathering Hollow.

"So I need to tell you something." Turtleblaze said, removing his gaze from the river and meeting Dawnfire's.

Dawnfire tensed slightly, but his voice didn't sound worried or angry, it sounds happy. "Alright, go for it."

"There's a lot of kits being born, Applespots just had her three and Squirrletail will be having hers in the next moon or so."

Dawnfire tilted her head. "Yeah?" Where was he going with this?

"There's going to be even more." His green eyes glowed. "Fawnheart is expecting my kits." Dawnfire's jaw dropped, she was shocked. Her brother? Having kits? He was going to be a father? Turtleblaze's happy gaze faltered a bit. "Are you okay?"

Dawnfire shook her head slightly, clearing her mind. Suddenly waves of emotion rushed across her. Turtleblaze was having kits! "Yes! I'm absolutely okay! You're gonna have kits!" She bursted out.

Joy spread across Turtleblaze's body. "I'm really excited," He purred. "Fawnheart is scared; but I know she's going to be a great mother."

"And you're going to be a great father." Dawnfire touched her nose to Turtleblaze's. "I'm so happy for you."

Turtleblaze nuzzled her. "Thank you, Dawnfire." They stood there for a few moments before stepping back. "I know you're not super fond of Fawnheart but I really love her." His eyes glowed with such affection, the same affection she felt for Lionclaw.

Dawnfire purred. "If you love her then I love her too, she's going to give me some kin after all." She let out a small laugh and looked at him. "Why don't we actually hunt something?" She suggested. Turtleblaze agreed and they began hunting together. Dawnfire had forgotten how much fun it was to spend time with her brother, they had grown so distant and they probably would when his kits were born; but Dawnfire didn't think it would be a bad thing.

Dawnfire was going to spend as much time around his kits as she could, she wanted to get to know her future nieces and nephews, she wondered what they would look like. What their names would be, she already wanted to meet them; but that wouldn't happen for another two moons. She would just have to be patient. The hunt went well, Turtleblaze caught two mice and a squirrel while Dawnfire caught four mice, one of which was rather large. They headed back to camp, proud of their catch.

Everything was going well until they were greeted by Thornpelt.

"Dawnfire." He growled. "Where have you been?" He demanded. Dawnfire tensed and set her kill down.

"I was out hunting if you couldn't tell." She flicked her tail, Turtleblaze gave her a weird glance. "And we made a nice catch."

"You should be training your apprentice." Thornpelt said sternly. "All he's been doing is messing with my kits."

"You go on ahead Turtleblaze, go say hi to Fawnheart for me." She dismissed her brother, there was no way Thornpelt would try

anything just outside of camp. "He wouldn't do anything wrong."

Thornpelt lashed his tail. "My kits are going to be the greatest warriors in SunClan, I don't want your weak, pathetic apprentice around them."

Dawnfire took a confident step forward. "My apprentice is an amazing hunter, and amazing stalker and he does his duties without complaining. I couldn't ask for a better apprentice, he won't do anything to make your kits weaker."

"Watch yourself, Dawnfire. " He growled. "I won't complain when that idiotic apprentice of yours is dead on the forest floor."

Dawnfire unsheathed her claws. "You won't touch a hair on my apprentice."

"You're too scared to fight me, Dawnfire." Thornpelt spat. "You've always been too scared and you always will be." He turned away. "Take your kill and then take care of your apprentice."

Dawnfire dug her claws into the ground, he wasn't even trying to hide the fact that he was murderer around her anymore. Why couldn't he do that around Flowerstar? Dawnfire shook her head and picked up her prey, she set it down on the fresh-kill pile and looked around for Lionclaw, he was speaking with Thornpelt already. He left a moment later and grabbed Bramblepelt, Willownose, Flamepetal and Redclaw. He bounded over to her quickly. "I'd love to talk but I'm off on a border patrol." He nuzzled her cheek and left with his patrol. Dawnfire sighed, she never had any time to spend with Lionclaw. He was always on either hunting or border patrols, and never with her. She couldn't help but feel that Thornpelt had something to do with it. He was keeping them apart on purpose, and when he wasn't on patrols he was very tired. Dawnfire groaned and went to find Cloudpaw, she found him talking with Pebblestep just outside the medicine den.

"Hi, Dawnfire!" Cloudpaw greeted happily, flicking his ears.

"Greetings, Dawnfire." Pebblestep dipped her head, her blue eyes soft. "I just spoke to your brother." She purred.

Dawnfire chuckled. "Yeah, we just went hunting and he told me."

"Told you what?" Cloudpaw questioned.

"He and Fawnheart are having kits." Dawnfire explained, the tom's eyes grew wide.

"Even more kits? That's fantastic!" He beamed, eyes glowing brighter than the sun. He flexed his claws joyfully. "So many kits! And maybe when they become apprentices I'll be a warrior and I can mentor one!"

Dawnfire nudged him. "It will still be a bit before you become a warrior." She purred. "But you have been doing very good lately."

Cloudpaw puffed out his chest and Pebblestep let out a *mrrow* of laughter. "I've heard nothing but good things about you, Cloudpaw. From the elders as well as the queens."

Cloudpaw purred louder. "Are we going to go hunting today, Dawnfire?" He asked. Dawnfire thought for a moment, her mind drifted to Thornpelt's threat.

"Actually, let's do some battle training." She suggested instead, he seemed to enjoy that idea even more. They bid farewell to Pebblestep and headed towards the training area. Cloudpaw was a good hunter and a good tracker, but he was a bit clumsy on his paws; making his battle moves less than perfect.

Dawnfire sat in the training area and faced her apprentice. "I've been focusing too much on hunting and stalking rather than fighting lately, but luckily they can be applied together." She stood up. "You have great sneaking skills, but once that's done you'll actually have to battle. I've taught you some battle moves, but I wanna see if you can still do them. Go ahead, attack me."

Cloudpaw dipped his head and dropped into his hunting crouch, it was a good form but she wasn't prey. He would have to use much more force on her than he would on a mouse or squirrel. Cloudpaw dashed forward, he was fast but once again he tripped over his paws. Instead of tackling Dawnfire he barreled into her, knocking

her to the sandy ground. Cloudpaw tried to recover, he scrambled to his paws to try and get on top of her but Dawnfire threw him to the ground with ease.

"You're clumsy," She stated sternly. "You always have been, you can't allow yourself to trip like that. If I was an AshClan warrior you'd be terribly wounded and if I was Echoheart you'd be dead." Cloudpaw got to his paws and shook the sand from his fur.

"Let me try again." He asked, eyes bright. Dawnfire nodded and he attempted the attack again, he didn't trip this time but Dawnfire threw him on the ground again, he winced but was already back on his paws. His eyes were focused now.

"Again?" Dawnfire asked, but before he answered he jumped onto her back. Dawnfire was taken aback, and stumbled under his weight. She fell hard to the ground and instantly tried to throw him off. His paws gripped her back so it took more effort, but she managed to throw him off, but Cloudpaw recoiled quickly, his paws jabbed into her side and Dawnfire winced with pain. Her paws met his upper belly and she shoved him backwards, Cloudpaw's back hit the ground and she moved to pin him. Dawnfire met Cloudpaw's gaze, it was bright. She let out a purr. "That was very good." She let him up. "Taking me by surprise like that, that's always good to keep in mind." Dawnfire shook the sand from her pelt once more. "Once you have the element of surprise, the fight is instantly in your favor. With a little more practice maybe I'll be the one pinned down."

Cloudpaw nodded and Dawnfire decided to test something. This time it was her who attacked without warning, she dashed forward and knocked his legs out from under him. Cloudpaw landed on his side but rolled away quickly. His paw shot forward, hitting Dawnfire in the side of the head. She moved forward, keeping her paws steady on the ground and shoved him to the side once more. Cloudpaw landed smoothly and moved in for his next attack. Dawnfire could see where he was aiming and dodged his attack before swiftly throwing him to the ground.

"You recovered nicely," Dawnfire praised. "Something you have to be aware of is sneak attacks, if they get the element of surprise then it could be the death of you. However, you were quick to react and

landed some nice blows." Cloudpaw puffed out his chest and his eyes glowed. Dawnfire purred and continued their battle training. They trained for a long time, Cloudpaw didn't manage to get Dawnfire pinned but came close several times. They didn't stop until dusk, the sun was falling low in the sky and night would soon take over.

"Let's go home." Dawnfire said, looking around. "Fighting in the dark isn't smart." She purred. Cloudpaw nodded and the two of them left the training area to head back to camp. It wasn't until Dawnfire got back to her nest did she realize how sore she was. Cloudpaw had fought hard, he landed a couple good blows on her. He was a fast learner, Dawnfire realised he would be sore too. She would let him rest tomorrow, and get some good sleep tonight. Dawnfire knew she would sleep well, she took her spot beside Lionclaw who was already fast asleep. Her eyes rested on the sleeping form of her brother, she let out a happy purr. No matter what Thornpelt tried, he would never take the things she really loved. Dawnfire would fight to the death to protect her apprentice, her future kin, Lionclaw and her entire Clan. Thornpelt would not win.

Chapter 30

Dawnfire paced outside the nursery, her tail twitching nervously. Pebblestep brushed past her with dock leaves and moss. Applespots had her three kits herded outside in the sun, Cherrykit and Thurshkit tried fighting past their mother.

"I wanna see!" Cherrykit argued.

"We didn't get to see Rosekit be born either!" Thurshkit growled.

"You're not going in there! Poppyfur and Pebblestep need their space!" Applespots hissed and pulled her kits closer. Briarkit was the only calm one, she huddled behind her mother, she had always been skittish. Even at two moons old, she still hid behind her mother or sister. Squirreltail was inside the nursery with the medicine cat, Turtleblaze and Fawnheart. Her and Fawnheart had been pretty close friends as apprentices, and now they were friends again as queens. A moon ago, Squirrletail had given birth to a single kit she named Rosekit. She was a small ginger she-cat with the same green eyes as her mother as well as white tipped tail. Rosekit sat with her father and watched with eager eyes, but remained silent.

Now it was Fawnheart's turn, two moons of carrying her kits and they were ready to come out. Dawnfire was extremely excited and scared, she was suddenly getting memories of Dovetail's birth. Would everything be okay? Dawnfire shook her head, of course it would! Fawnheart had both medicine cats to care for her. Dawnfire wished Lionclaw was here, but once again he was on patrol. She wanted to share this moment with him. Dawnfire sat outside, claws the ground nervously.

"Honestly, Dawnfire." Applespots purred, still trying to contain her kits. "You're more nervous than Turtleblaze!"

Dawnfire ducked her head. "I'm just excited." She watched the

nursery for what seemed like forever, she could hear Fawnheart let out cries of pain Dawnfire tensed with each one, but just as sunhigh reached the sky, Pebbelstep came out, eyes bright and cheerful.

"There's two of them, a tom and a she-cat." Pebblestep purred happily. "You can go in now, Dawnfire." Dawnfire had been disallowed in the nursery because it was already crowded, but now she could finally see the new kits. Dawnfire composed herself and entered the nursery, Fawnheart was on her side with two brown kits at her side. Turtleblaze was slowly lapping at her head. Dawnfire met his gaze and purred softly. Fawnheart opened her eyes to look at Dawnfire.

"They're beautiful." Dawnfire looked down at her niece and nephew, one of them let out a tiny mew every few moments despite eating.

Fawnheart purred. "Thank you, Dawnfire." She looked at her new kits. "The one making all the noise is the she-cat, her name is Earthkit and the tom next to her is Mudkit."

Dawnfire's heart glowed as bright as the sun. "I love them already." Dawnfire looked at them with such joy, Turtleblaze met her gaze.

"They are amazing aren't they?" He chuckled. "You did amazing, my love." He touched his nose to Fawnheart's who purred with affection.

"I'm going to let you get some sleep, Fawnheart." Dawnfire dipped her head. "I'll come see them later."

Fawnheart's were softer than they ever had been, over the past two moons Dawnfire had been concerned if Fawnheart would be a good mother of if she would be snappy like she normally was, but Dawnfire could tell from the look in her eyes that she already loved her kits, and she would be a wonderful mother. Dawnfire bid one last farewell to Turtleblaze before exiting. She met Poppyfur outside, even her eyes were soft.

"They are quite the pair of kits." The medicine cat purred. "You must be proud of your brother and his mate."

"I am," Dawnfire looked back at the nursery. "Earthkit has quite the mouth on her already." She chuckled.

"That kit came out wailing." Poppyfur mewed. "That's a good sign, she's gonna be a strong cat and Mudkit came out just as strong; just not as loud."

"Thank you for taking such good care of Fawnheart." Dawnfire dipped her head to the medicine cat.

Poppyfur nodded. "I always love delivering kits, it's the best part about being a medicine cat." She said. Dawnfire had rarely seen such a soft side to Poppyfur, the medicine cat had very recently been sticking to her den and not talking to many cats. Dawnfire wondered why, perhaps she was just getting older and liked the peace of her den. "Anyway, tonight's gathering will be the third gathering in a row where we announce new kits. The other Clans will know we are very strong and a forced to be reckoned with."

The moon was high in the sky, the murmur of cats spread throughout the gathering hollow. The air was chilly, but not uncomfortable. The gathering would start soon, all Clans were here and ready to share their news. When it did start, Flowerstar was the first to speak, she stood tall and proud above the the four Clans.

"SunClan once again is proud to announce the arrival of new kits. Earlier today Fawnheart gave birth to Earthkit and Mudkit. They are both happy and healthy." Flowerstar seemed to glow silver under the moonlight, her voice echoed with pride. There was nothing better than announcing the arrival of new kits, and SunClan had the chance to for the past three gatherings. Jaggedstar was the next up to speak.

"LichenClan is proud to announce that Foxpaw and Sorrelpaw are now apprentices, and we welcome Rootfang and Timberclaw have become warriors." The Clans cheered the names of the new warriors and apprentices with vigor, the only Clan that seemed to be quiet was AshClan. Dawnfire looked over to the shady Clan, she had sworn she had seen Echoheart earlier but now she was nowhere in sight. Dawnfire was confused, but now it was Lionstar's turn to speak.

"AshClan has no major news to report, but we are as strong as ever and prey is running well." He dipped his head and said no more. Shadowstar stepped forward next.

"MoonClan doesn't have much to announce, but prey is running well and our cats are as strong as ever."

"A quick gathering." Flowerstar mewed. "We could take this time to catch up and enjoy the beautiful night."

"I agree," Shadowstar dipped his head and the other two leaders nodded and the Clan's began to mingle. Dawnfire searched the crowd of cats for Silvermoon, she spotted her quickly but stopped when she heard Thornpelt's urgent mew. She looked towards the deputy who was talking to Flowerstar.

"We need to go back to camp, now." He demanded.

"What are you talking about, Thornpelt?" Flowerstar questioned. "Tonight is a gathering, what could be happening at camp?"

"I don't know...I just have a really bad feeling." Thornpelt's voice was rushed, but it didn't exactly sound scared.

Flowerstar sighed. "Fine, Thornpelt but if it's nothing I want a very good explanation." She raised her voice. "SunClan! Change of plans, we need to head back to camp." The cats of the Clans shared confused glances but SunClan obeyed their leader. Dawnfire met Silvermoon's gaze, the silver tabby was confused, as was Dawnfire. Dawnfire just shrugged and hurried after her Clan, she looked at Thornpelt, his eyes were urgent but not scared, Dawnfire didn't know why he wanted to go back to camp so urgently but something told her that they shouldn't leave.

She didn't argue and just followed her leader, Lionclaw fell in beside her. "Why are we going back so early?"

"I don't know." Was all Dawnfire said, they crossed the river and neared the camp. Dawnfire's fur stood on edge as she heard growling and hissing. What was happening? SunClan picked up their pace and burst into camp, the few cats that had been stayed

behind were being swarmed by AshClan warriors. Dawnfire suddenly realized why the AshClan group had seemed small, most of the warriors were attacking SunClan! Dread filled her chest, no wonder Echoheart wasn't there, she must have slipped out to organize this. Lionstar would never allow a fight on a full moon.

The rest of SunClan sprang into action, Dawnfire went for the she-cat closest to the nursery, Foxfeather. Dawnfire tackled her to the ground and bit into her shoulder, no way would she let some AshClan fox-dung hurt any kits! Foxfeather battered her stomach, and dug claws into her legs. Dawnfire dug her teeth into her scruff and threw her to the side where she stumbled into another AshClan warrior. Dawnfire stood before the nursery, Fawnheart cowered inside over her newborn kits and Applespots and Squirreltail were ready to fight. There wasn't time to get them to the moss hollow, they would just have to stay. Dawnfire assessed the battle, she found Echoheart as she fought with Bramblepelt, and Cloudpaw wrestled with Wheatpaw, his battle skills were certainly showing here.

There were two cats missing that made Dawnfire's blood run cold, Thornpelt and Flowerstar. Dawnfire ran over to Lionclaw who had just throw off Graypelt. "Where's Flowerstar?" She demanded quickly.

"She had gotten hurt by Echoheart so Thornpelt took her out of camp." Lionclaw explained, Dawnfire's heart suddenly started pounding her chest. This wasn't good! Without another word she tore away from Lionclaw towards the back of the camp. She ignored all other warriors, she had to find them before it was too late! This was what Echoheart and Thornpelt had been planning, to take SunClan by surprise and then kill Flowerstar. Dawnfire burst out of the back of camp.

"Thornpelt, why are we here?" Flowerstar's voice was pained.

"Because, Flowerstar. I needed you away from the battle." Thornpelt's mew was cold, Dawnfire ran faster.

"I'm not even hurt that bad, I should be fighting!" Flowerstar argued.

"No, you're not hurt that bad. Not yet."

"Thornpelt what are you--" Flowerstar was cut off, Dawnfire reached the moss hollow where she saw the entire scene, there wasn't a fight. Flowerstar was lying on the ground, her eyes wide with pain and fear, her neck was bleeding where Thornpelt had bit her. Dawnfire stared in horror and acted before she had time to think.

"Traitor!" She shouted and leapt into the moss hollow, Dawnfire landed square on Thornpelt's shoulders and he hit the ground with a yelp of pain. Dawnfire hit the hard stone bottom and pain shot through her body. Thornpelt recovered first and faced Dawnfire with rage in his eyes.

"You idiot!" He spat with a laugh. "Now I get to kill you both!" Dawnfire unsheathed her claws and lepton Thornpelt, she couldn't hold anything back. She couldn't let Thornpelt win! She dug her claws deep into his thick fur, she felt his teeth bury into her shoulder. Dawnfire raked his claws down his side, feeling his blood against her paws. Thornpelt was fighting to kill, and she had to do the same thing. Dawnfire twisted away from him and reached out with her claws, they raked across his cheek and he lept forward.

His entire body weight fell upon Dawnfire and she hit the ground, he was much stronger than her but she dug her claws into his belly, he winced in pain but didn't stop. "You should've have just let me do this, Dawnfire." He growled. "But now....now you're going to die and no one is here to save you! Cry to StarClan all you want, cry for your stupid parents because you'll be joining them soon!" Dawnfire braced herself for his teeth but the weight was lifted off of her, she heard Thornpelt's body hit the stone floor. Dawnfire opened her eyes to see Lionclaw, his amber eyes blazing like a fire.

"Lionclaw," Thornpelt got to his paws. "My wonderful nephew," He chuckled. "Have you come to help me?"

Lionclaw hissed. "You think I came to help you?" He unsheathed his large claws. "I followed her because I was concerned and I come across you trying to kill her!" His amber eyes burned intensely. "You're a traitor! And I am not your family." Lionclaw lept forward, rolling into Thornpelt, he was a much better match for Thornpelt

than Dawnfire was. Dawnfire's heart pounded as she watched Lionclaw and Thornpelt fight, it was brutal and blood was sprinkling the moss below. Dawnfire looked past them at Flowerstar who wasn't moving. *No!*

She ran past the two toms to her leader, Flowerstar's breathing had stopped. That couldn't be her last life! It seemed like forever, but Flowerstar's body twitched, she lifted her head and saw Thornpelt and Lionclaw fighting, she met Dawnfire's gaze for just a moment before standing up. "Thornpelt!" She spat.

Thornpelt stopped fighting for a split second which allowed Lionclaw to completely overpower him, pressing him hard against the ground and holding his paws where he couldn't fight back. "Stay down!" Lionclaw growled. Flowerstar moved slowly over to Thornpelt and looked down at him with pain and anger in her eyes.

"Why did you do this, Thornpelt?" She questioned, her voice surprisingly soft.

"Because, SunClan has been led by you for long enough" Thornpelt struggled under Lionclaw's grip. "I should've have been leader a long time ago!"

Flowerstar hissed and Dawnfire was shocked to see her slash out with her claws, raking them down the side of his face. "You sicken me, Thornpelt." She looked to Lionclaw. "Please take him back to camp, I do not want him dead. I want both of AshClan and SunClan to know what a failure and a disgrace he is. Flowerstar began walking away but stopped. "And Dawnfire," She looked into Dawnfire's eyes. "I'm sorry."

Dawnfire watched Flowerstar leave, she was surprisingly calm. Dawnfire then shook her head and looked at Thornpelt and Lionclaw. "I'll help you get him back." Lionclaw nodded and leaned down, taking a very strong bite into Thornpelt's scruff, Thornpelt hissed in pain and tried to fight but he didn't have the range of movement. Lionclaw had to essentially drag him out of the moss hollow and back to camp, when they got back the fighting was done, but AshClan remained. Dawnfire noticed Echoheart looking at Thornpelt, her murky eyes filled with disbelief.

"Cats of SunClan and AshClan!" Flowerstar announced, holding her head high. "Behold, the reason you are all in SunClan camp on a night that is supposed to be peaceful!" Lionclaw threw Thornpelt forward, he landed in front of Flowerstar and scrambled to his paws; he wouldn't attack in front of the entire camp and AshClan looked just as confused as SunClan did. Applespots peered out from the nursery, her kits must have still been hiding inside.

"During this battle," Flowerstar began. "Thornpelt took me outside and attempted to murder me only to be stopped by Dawnfire and Lionclaw." All the cats let out shocked gasps, SunClan stared at their deputy in horror. "The only reason you are here AshClan was so you could distract my Clan why Thornpelt took my life, and he would've became leader."

Thornpelt turned on Flowerstar. "SunClan deserves a better leader than you!"

"Silence!" Flowerstar's voice cut through the forest like claws, even Dawnfire winced as she shouted. "You are a disgrace to the warrior code and to SunClan." She turned her anger fueled gaze on to Echoheart. "I can only guess that you are the one behind this, and you are no better than him!"

"Do not talk down to me, Flowerstar!" Echoheart hissed.

"This is my camp!" Flowerstar took a swift step towards Echoheart who backed off. "You are a disgrace to your own Clan and I will be having a conversation about this with Lionstar shortly. "Disgusting warrior." Flowerstar growled. Dawnfire was shocked, she never knew that Flowerstar could be so ruthless. "Leave, AshClan! Leave with what dignity you have left." Echoheart hesitated but quickly led her warriors away, leaving SunClan shocked at the news of Thornpelt. "As for you, Thornpelt..."

"What are you going to do, Flowerstar?" Thornpelt demanded with a laugh. "Kill me? Please do it in front of my kits so they can hate you forever." Dawnfire shuddered, she looked over to Applespots who's green eyes were filled with shock, disbelief and hurt.

"No, Thornpelt I am not going to kill you. I'm not a murderer like

you." She said sternly. "However, from this day forward you are no longer a SunClan warrior. You are exiled from stepping into SunClan territory until the day you die." Flowerstar towered over him. "I want every cat to look at Thornpelt, for he is no longer your deputy, no longer your fellow warrior. He is an enemy, a traitor to you, and to the the warrior code. If you see him in SunClan territory; treat him as nothing more than a rogue."

Thornpelt laughed. "You really think you can turn all of SunClan against me?" He met Flowerstar's gaze. "These cats idolize me, and I will leave but I know they will follow me!" He turned to the nursery. "Applespots, come with me. We will take our kits and leave this pathetic Clan behind. I will train our kits to be better warriors than these idiots ever could!"

Applespots was shocked, she looked over her Clanmates then looked back at her mate. "No, Thornpelt." Her voice cracked, even Thornpelt seemed surprised. "My home is with SunClan, as do our kits. They will grow up without their father," Her eyes grew pained and she looked away. "But they will grow up loyal SunClan warriors; unlike you."

Thornpelt's pelt bristled. "Those kits belong to me!" Applespots winced.

"Try anything, Thornpelt;" Bramblepelt stepped forward. "And I will personally shred you to pieces."

Thornpelt looked at his brother. "My own brother turning on me..." He grumbled. "What about you two? Is there any loyalty?" He looked at Crowstep and Rainears, the two she-cats shared the same look.

"You lost our loyalty the second you turned against SunClan." Crowstep said boldly.

"It's time for you to leave, Thornpelt." Every cat was shocked to hear the voice of Hawktalon, Thornpelt's father. Nightwing stood next to him, her eyes sad and disappointed.

"My own parents...." Thornpelt hung his head low.

"You are not our kit," Nightwing said sadly. "You are a disgrace, and a traitor."

Thornpelt looked around, all of SunClan had turned on him; just as he had turned on them, he unsheathed his claws. "You are all making a mistake, and when the time comes....you're going to wish you followed me." Dawnfire suddenly met his gaze, it burned with pure anger. "And you, Dawnfire. No matter what happens, I will make sure that you die by my claws. I will be looking forward to the day where I can rip your life away from you; and watch you bleed out across the forest floor."

Lionclaw took a step forward and growled, but Dawnfire stopped him. "Threaten me all you want, Thornpelt but I am no longer scared of you. Everyone knows the truth about you, and they all hate you." Dawnfire felt a rush of joy and confidence. "You will never be leader of SunClan, Thornpelt. You are nothing anymore and I'm not scared of you!"

Thornpelt took a step back, he looked around; clearly upset with his failure.

"It's time to go, Thornpelt." Flowerstar stood before him. "I want five able warriors to escort him from the territory and if he tries anything....kill him."

Thornpelt laughed and shook his head. "You will never kill me, Flowerstar." Flowerstar turned away without another word. In the end it was Lionclaw, Rockfur, Bramblepelt, Redclaw and Snakewhisker who took Thornpelt out of the camp, before he left he cast one final, murderous glance at Dawnfire before he disappeared.

Everything felt surreal, Thornpelt was gone and the Clan had no deputy. Applespots had disappeared back into the nursery, Dawnfire knew that Fawnheart and Squirreltail would care for her. Dawnfire could feel all of SunClan in shock, the camp was dead silent. Dawnfire was snapped from her shock when Lionclaw nudged her. "Are you alright?" He questioned softly.

Dawnfire looked at him, she looked over her wounds they were big but had stopped bleeding. "I'm fine," She said and noticed a long,

deep scratch down his leg. "How about you?"

"I'm fine as well." He nuzzled her cheek.

"Thank you for helping." Dawnfire said in his ear. "I thought I was gonna die."

"Of course, Dawnfire. I just wish I wouldn't of had to. I still can't believe what he did." Dawnfire pressed against him.

"Dawnfire." Dawnfire jumped and turned to see Flowerstar, her throat had been covered with marigold and cobweb. "Can I speak with you in my den?" Dawnfire looked at Lionclaw who nodded. Dawnfire stood up and followed Flowerstar, what was the leader going to say.

When they were in Flowerstar's den, Flowerstar sat down. The anger had faded from her eyes and now were exhausted and sad. "I'm sorry for not believing you about Thornpelt."

"It's okay--" Flowerstar cut Dawnfire off.

"No, it's not okay. I should've have listened to you, but I was so blinded." Flowerstar laid down, her eyes deep with sadness. "Thornpelt and I used to be best friends; when we were kids we made a promise. A promise that if he became leader then he would make me deputy and if I became leader I would make him deputy. However, when I became leader he hadn't finished training an apprentice, he had never even been given one. So I chose Tigertail, and he hated me ever since. The night your parents died he reminded me of our promise and I made you a warrior and chose him.

"I always knew that something was off with him, ever since his uncle Falconclaw tried to kill me and he never tried to stop him, but I wanted to believe that I was wrong so when you told me what he was planning...I didn't want to believe it and I lashed out at you and that was wrong, I'm so sorry Dawnfire."

There was moment of silence, Dawnfire wasn't sure what to say. She had never knew that Flowerstar and Thornpelt had been friends, or

even that they made that promise, finally she found the words. "When my sister died, I promised her that I would become leader." Dawnfire admitted. "I never knew what to do after Willowkit died, as an apprentice I tried to keep that mind but I guess I've become so focused on my other duties I haven't been thinking of my promise to Willowkit."

Flowerstar looked up. "You're an amazing warrior, Dawnfire. You're brave, you're smart and most of all loyal. I'm sure that your sister is proud of you." Flowerstar sat up, her eyes growing a bit softer. "You know, Pebblestep was telling me how well Cloudpaw fought in the battle and how he barely has a scratch on him."

"Really?" Dawnfire met her leader's gaze. She hadn't spoken to Cloudpaw just yet, not since she left camp.

"Yes, and he always brings back so much prey. You've trained him very well, so I have a question." Dawnfire gave Flowerstar a questioning look. "Do you think he's ready to become a warrior?"

Dawnfire was somewhat surprised by the question, but thought about it. Cloudpaw was a lot more mature and he had learned to control his weight so he was less clumsy, he fought hard and always brought back a lot of prey. Dawnfire felt confident in saying "Yes."

Flowerstar purred. "Then it's settled, but now I have another question. You are one of my best warriors, you are young but I believe there is no better cat suited for the job." Dawnfire was wondering what job she was hinting at, she had an idea but couldn't believe that Flowerstar wanted to her to do it. "Will you be the new deputy of SunClan?"

Dawnfire was shocked, she stared at her paws. Her? Deputy? Second in command to Flowerstar? Could she really do it? Could she really be deputy and lead the Clan alongside Flowerstar. Dawnfire was unsure of herself, but somehow...she felt she could do it. "Yes, Flowerstar. I would be honored." Dawnfire dipped her head.

"Thank you, Flowerstar." She touched her nose to Dawnfire's head. "It's almost moonhigh, it's time to announce it. Take a moment to tell Cloudpaw and I will call the Clan."

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey join beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Flowerstar's voice rang out over the camp, the still shocked SunClan warriors all slowly made their way to the center of camp, there was no sign of Applespots. Dawnfire had told Cloudpaw that he was becoming a warrior, and the tom-cat couldn't be happier. He sat with his older siblings and struggled to stay still, Dawnfire was both excited and terrified at this meeting.

"I know that Thornpelt's exile is a shock to all of us, but we need to look at his in the light. Thornpelt is no longer a threat to our Clan, and we can grow stronger because of this!" The Clan lifted their heads a bit, their eyes were shining a bit brighter. "And I want to welcome a new warrior to act as a light of hope for our future." She jumped down. "Cloudpaw, please step forward." Cloudpaw hurried forward, his paws shaking under him. Cinderheart, Yarrowtail, Pebblestep, Rockfur and Willownose all looked at him with pride. "StarClan, I call upon you to look down on this apprentice for he has trained long and hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I ask you to commend him as a warrior in his turn." Cloudpaw's eyes went wide, he looked up at the sky for a moment. Was he thinking of Dovetail? The mother he never got to meet. "Cloudpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Cloudpaw's voice shook, not with fear but with pride and and excitement.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Cloudpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Cloudspots. SunClan honors your patience and your bravery and we welcome you as a full warrior of SunClan!"

"Cloudspots! Cloudspots! Cloudspots!" The cats of SunClan cheered, suddenly full of life and hope. Cloudspots turned to face Dawnfire, his eyes glowing with a flurry of emotion.

"Now, it is time to appoint a new deputy now that Thornpelt is gone; and now that Cloudspots is a warrior I can." Dawnfire stood up, her heart pounding in her chest.

"I say these words before the spirits of StarClan, so they may hear

and approve my choice...Dawnfire, will be the new deputy of SunClan!"

Dawnfire felt every cat in SunClan's eyes burning into her pelt, she met the gazes of Turtleblaze, Lionclaw and Poppyfur. They all seemed so proud and so happy. Dawnfire stepped forward. "I know I'm young, but I promise you SunClan. I will do everything I can to protect this Clan until the day I die."

"Dawnfire! Dawnfire! Dawnfire!" The Clan cheered her name, Dawnfire felt their life and hopes flooding into her she was now the deputy of SunClan and she would fight to the death to protect her Clan.

Chapter 31

"Dawnfire!"

Dawnfire jolted awake, alarm shooting through her for a split second. The first thing she saw was Snakewhisker staring sternly at her. She scrambled to her paws, dawn was peeking into the warriors den. She had overslept!

"You do realize you're still deputy, right?" Snakewhisker questioned. "You need to get better about organizing patrols. We have to remain on time."

Dawnfire nodded. "Sorry, Snakewhisker." Her belt burned and she hurried out the warrior den, stretching her legs as she did so. Snakewhisker followed her out. It was only her third day of being SunClan's deputy and she was struggling to adjust. Thankfully, she had Snakewhisker to help her out. Snakewhisker had been deputy for a short time, and stood in for deputy for a day after Blazeheart's death. He had been helping her figure out which cats to put where and how often to send out border patrols. Her new role was stressful and sometimes chaotic, more often than not she had cats coming to her asking to be on patrol or to go hunting, and she didn't like saying now, but for now she just had to do the dawn patrol.

"Okay, Snakewhisker since you're up you can lead it and take...." Dawnfire thought for a moment. "Take Snowtail, Rustpelt, Crowfur and Cloudspots." Snakewhisker nodded and returned to the warrior den to wake the sleeping warriors, with the exception of Cloudspots who was still alone in the apprentice den due to lack of space. Dawnfire looked around camp, the sun was starting to rise already. She felt bad that she had woken up late, she had to get used to waking up at dawn, she hadn't done that since she was a kit. She began running through her head what needed to be done, the nursery and elders den could use some tending and now they had no apprentices. Since Cloudspots would be on patrol, Dawnfire decided to send Flamepetal, Heatherflight and Brackenpelt to attend

to them.

Greenleaf would be over before they knew it, so the fresh-kill pile needed to be stocked as much as possible. Dawnfire decided to have Yarrowtail lead a hunting patrol near the MoonClan border and Goldenleaf lead one near the AshClan border. Dawnfire approached the two cats when they and sent Yarrowtail with Turtleblaze, Sandfoot and Rainears and Goldenleaf with Lionclaw, Icepetal, Adderstrike and Redclaw. Dawnfire ran through all the patrols, there would have to be a sunhigh patrol. Who would lead that?

Dawnfire decided since she was the deputy now, she should lead some patrols. She would to see who was all back when the time came to see who she wanted to join her. Dawnfire sat patiently by the Drinking Pool waiting for the dawn patrol returned, while she waited she watched the nursery, it wasn't long before Applespot's three kits spilled out, tripping over each other. Applespots sat just outside the nursery, watching her kits closely. Her green eyes displayed a wide variety of emotions, love for her kits and a gentle focus, but there was also a sense of distance to them. She still was adjusting to Thornpelt's exile, and she was the one who had to explain to her children where their father went.

They were young, but they would certainly have some memories of him. Thornpelt spent a lot of time when his kits in the three moons that they were alive, and when Applespots told them they didn't quite understand. Dawnfire had overheard the conversation.

"Your father had to leave, he did very bad things but that doesn't mean he doesn't love you, okay?" Applespots had told them.

"What did he do?" Cherrykit had questioned. "Did he lie?"

"No, stupid. They wouldn't throw him out for lying." Thurshkit was very harsh already towards his sisters, namely Briarkit. He made Dawnfire uncomfortable, but she fought the unease down. *He's just a kit.* Dawnfire had to tell herself over and over, he's just a kit.

Dawnfire's attention was snapped away from the nursery when the dawn patrol returned, Dawnfire quickly padded up to Snakewhisker for his report. He claimed that there were no odd or enemy scents,

the odd scents being Thornpelt. He hadn't been spotted since he left SunClan and Dawnfire hoped that she would never see him again; but there was a clawing feeling in her chest that she would before too long. *And you, Dawnfire. No matter what happens, I will make sure that you die by my claws*. Thornpelt's threat rang in her ears every day, she knew he would be seeing him again and now he had nothing to lose.

Dawnfire thanked Snakewhisker and dismissed him and the other warriors, Dawnfire hoped all of this would pass over. That she would get used to being deputy, that Applespots would live on without her mate, and that the Clan would adjust. SunClan have always been respected for their loyalty, but not every cat could be loyal.

The day went on and so did SunClan, Dawnfire ended up taking Rockfur, Stormwind, Willownose and Heatherflight on her patrol across the AshClan border. Dawnfire still felt uncomfortable along this border; but the patrol went without issue. Nothing out of the ordinary, everything seemed so peaceful and perfect. Dawnfire really didn't like it, perhaps Lionstar found out about the fight and AshClan was keeping their distance, it sounded like something Lionstar would do but not something Echoheart would listen to. Dawnfire led the patrol home and organized one more hunting patrol and a final night patrol before the Clan settled down.

"You've really got the Clan working hard." Dawnfire jumped slightly when she heard Lionclaw's voice, he met her with warm eyes. Dawnfire padded over to him and touched his nose with hers.

"I want the Clan to focus on something other than Thornpelt's exile. It's all cats are talking about and it's something I'd rather not hear about." Dawnfire explained with a twitch of her tail.

Lionclaw ran his tail across her pelt. "You gotta give it time," He mewed. "We can't just act like nothing ever happened; we can't forget what he did and we can't forget that he's a threat."

Dawnfire sighed and lay in the grass, tucking her paws under his chest. "I know, I just want the Clan to prosper you know? I'm the deputy now, my father was an incredible deputy and I don't want to

let anyone down." Dawnfire stared at the ground, her unease and nerves building up again and clawing at her heart.

"Listen to me, Dawnfire." Dawnfire looked up at Lionclaw, his amber eyes were intense. "You will not let anybody down, you're already a wonderful deputy. The fact that you want to serve your Clan so much is proof enough that you're a good deputy. The only cat you should worry about letting down is yourself, because if you prove you're good enough for yourself then that's all you need."

Dawnfire stared into his eyes, she focused a lot on his words. He had a point, Lionclaw was a lot smarter than anyone gave him credit for. Then again the cat had been through a lot; the death of both of his parents and the betrayal of kin. However, Lionclaw was never one to let those sort of things weaken him. He and Goldenleaf were similar that way, Goldenleaf took the struggles in her life to make her a better cat to those around her; Lionclaw used it to make himself stronger. Either way neither sibling allowed themselves to fall too hard with loss. Dawnfire let out a small sigh, stared at the rising moon for a moment then back at Lionclaw. "Thank you." She purred softly.

Lionclaw nuzzled her ear. "No problem, now get off the ground. Let's go for a walk." His eyes glowed with the moonlight, Dawnfire was confused but she stood up anyway. Lionclaw led Dawnfire out the back of camp in the opposite direction of the Moss Hollow, he looked at her; a glint of challenge flashing in his eyes and suddenly started running. Dawnfire's heart skipped a beat and she quickly realized, Dawnfire broke into a sprint shortly after and caught up with ease. Dawnfire didn't realize this is what she needed, to run through the forest with a cat she cared deeply for.

Lionclaw lept over a large log and Dawnfire copied him, landing gracefully on her paws. Lionclaw skidded to a stop just before the MoonClan river border causing Dawnfire to stumble into him, they rolled over each other and stopped just at the river bank with Lionclaw landing on top of her. He was laughing and Dawnfire let out small pants as she forced her way out from under him. Both their fur was ruffled and had bits of dried grass in them. Dawnfire looked at Lionclaw, his amber eyes sparkling playfully. "You've gotten faster." He said with a purr to his voice.

"Of course I have, you've seen Cloudspots. Gotta work to keep up with him." Dawnfire laughed.

"He's a great warrior," Lionclaw stood and clawed some grass from his fur. "You did an amazing job training him." Lionclaw stood up and brushed against her. "Then again, everything you do is amazing."

"Oh, stop." Dawnfire flicked his ears with her paw playfully.

"I will not stop." Lionclaw puffed out his chest. "Because it's absolutely true. I wouldn't be spending as much time with you if it wasn't true. I only hang out with the best." Lionclaw sneered teasingly and pushed her over.

Dawnfire looked up at him, her heart racing in her chest. Thornpelt had kept them apart for quite a while, Dawnfire forgot how she felt around Lionclaw. She craned her neck to touch her muzzle to his cheek. Lionclaw filled her was such joy and happiness, she needed to make sure to spend more time around him; even if she was deputy now. Lionclaw got off of her and rested beside her and began softly licking her ears. Dawnfire closed his eyes, feeling his warmth and strong scent all around her. The moon was high in the sky now, casting a beautiful light over the river.

Dawnfire's mind was clear of anything related to Thornpelt or AshClan, she was comfortable with the cat she cared about so much.

"Dawnfire," Lionclaw's voice was soft in her ear. Dawnfire turned to look at him, his amber eyes soft as honey. "I love you."

Dawnfire's heart began to race even faster, he loved her? Dawnfire's mind was suddenly flooded with all the time she had spent with Lionclaw, how much she enjoyed his company and pretty much everything about him. There was no doubt in her mind.

"I love you too." Her voice was quiet, but seemed louder than anything around them. She really did love Lionclaw, with all of her heart and soul.

The two of them stayed with each other for quite a while, returning to camp just before dawn; pelts brushing and tails intertwined. Dawnfire was tired from lack of sleep but had also never felt more alive, she told Sandfoot who she wanted for the Dawn patrol so she could get a little bit of sleep and to wake her when the patrol returned. As they made their way to the warrior's den, Dawnfire couldn't help but notice Poppyfur; glaring at her from the medicine den. What did she do? Dawnfire didn't give it much thought, she was happy and just wanted it to stay this way.

Chapter 32

Everything seemed so perfect in SunClan, Greenleaf was in it's prime, Dawnfire was happy with Lionclaw, the Clan was prospering and Thornclaw hadn't shown his ugly face at all. Dawnfire was getting the hang of being deputy, when she wasn't with Lionclaw she was thinking of patrols to organize. Dawnfire actually felt comfortable with herself, something she hadn't felt in several moons. Dawnfire had just sent off a hunting patrol and was setting up the sunhigh patrol for herself to lead, she needed to get out and stretch her paws. Dawnfire gathered Lionclaw, Icepetal, Snakewhisker and Flamepetal to join her and they quickly set out.

The forest was beautiful and green, the sun shining down onto every plant and rock; filling the SunClan cats with energy. Greenleaf was SunClan's element, the sun gave them everything. Dawnfire confidently led her patrol to the AshClan border, marked it and was about to leave until an overwhelming AshClan scent flooded her nose. Dawnfire stopped and faced the border, five cats came into view. Riverstorm was at the head of it, so Dawnfire wasn't too concerned with a fight; the only time Riverstorm led a fight was when they tried to take SunClan's herbs. Dawnfire faced herself to greet the patrol.

Behind Riverstorm was Cloverstrike, Ashblaze, Featherfall and much to Dawnfire's annoyance; Echoheart. "Greetings, Riverstorm." Dawnfire dipped her head respectfully. Only two of the cats had been in the invasion at the gathering, surprisingly Ashblaze hadn't been.

"Hello, Dawnfire." Riverstorm was just as respectful. "How goes it?"

"Very good, thank you. And you?"

"Also good." Riverstorm's blue eyes were gentle. "However, we heard about what happened at the last gathering and I'm glad I ran into you." Dawnfire twitched her ears, she supposed Echoheart would tell every cat that would listen about Thornpelt's exile. "And

Lionstar wanted to apologize on behalf of our warriors, all of them were punished."

"Good to hear it." Dawnfire flicked her tail and met Echoheart's toxic gaze, the gray she-cat spat at her.

"Hush, Echoheart." Riverstorm spat. "You deserved it." The blue-gray deputy shook her head. "Anyway, who is the new deputy if you don't mind me asking?"

"You're looking at her!" Lionclaw piped up beside Dawnfire, Dawnfire noticed the look of shock and annoyance in Echoheart's eyes.

"Oh, wow." Riverstorm looked over Dawnfire. "You're so young," Her blue eyes were stern for a moment but they softened. "Well I'm sure you're a fantastic deputy. Does that mean Cloudpaw is a warrior now?"

Dawnfire nodded and was about to speak; but was silenced by a hiss. "Let's leave Riverstorm instead of chatting with an enemy Clan!" Echoheart hissed.

Riverstorm let out a sigh but it was Snakewhisker who spoke. "We're just being friendly, Echoheart, but I forget you don't know what that means."

"Coming from a cat who couldn't handle being deputy?" Echoheart sneered.

"Coming from a cat who was removed from being deputy?" Snakewhisker didn't hesitate and he didn't wait for a response, he turned to Dawnfire. "We really should be going, Dawnfire." Dawnfire agreed.

"It was nice talking to you Riverstorm, I'll be seeing you at the next gathering." Dawnfire dipped her head, Riverstorm gave a friendly parting and they two patrols continued on. Dawnfire felt good, she enjoyed Riverstorm she was a loyal and kind cat; she would make a great leader one day.

The SunClan patrol returned home and Dawnfire headed to

Flowerstar's den where the leader was sharing fresh-kill with her sister, Stormwind. "Greetings, Dawnfire. Please come in." Flowerstar beckoned. Dawnfire dipped her head to both she-cats in turn. "How was the patrol?"

"Good, we met a patrol let by Riverstorm but she was very kind and gave an apology for AshClan's actions on behalf of Lionstar." Dawnfire explained.

Stormwind snorted. "They should be sorry."

Flowerstar let out a small purr. "We have to remember that it wasn't Lionstar who planned this, but his warriors went behind his back; it's Echoheart who should apologize."

"I don't trust that she-cat." Stormwind shuddered. "Never have, never will." Dawnfire couldn't help but agree with Stormwind.

Flowerstar flicked her tail over Stormwind's ears and looked at Dawnfire. "If that's all, then you may go. Thank you, Dawnfire." Feeling good, Dawnfire dipped her head and left the den, much to her surprise she was instantly greeted by Poppyfur; her green eyes sparking something hostile.

"I want to talk to you." The medicine cat said, her mew was half-growling.

"Okay?" Dawnfire followed Poppyfur to her den, once inside Poppyfur turned on her paws to face Dawnfire.

"What do you think you're doing?" Dawnfire winced at Poppyfur's tone.

"What are you talking about?" Dawnfire looked around in confusion.

"Taking a mate as deputy," Poppyfur grumbled. "You don't need to concern yourself with a mate or kits."

Dawnfire was suddenly taken aback, why did Poppyfur even care? Why should it matter if she had a mate and was deputy, it wouldn't be the first time it's happened. Dawnfire stepped towards her, anger

crawling under her pelt. "Why should that even be an issue, I'm allowed to have a mate or kits if I so chose!" Dawnfire was a little bit shocked with herself, she hadn't even considered kits, would it be terrible? She certainly loved Lionclaw...

"You have a destiny Dawnfire," Poppyfur reminded her of the prophecy that Dawnfire learned about moons ago. She had let it slip to the back of her mind, she didn't want to think about it. Dawnfire and Poppyfur hadn't really spoken to each other after that, Dawnfire didn't like thinking about destiny or that there even was a prophecy about her. "It's your destiny to become leader and protect the Clan, When the for--"

Dawnfire cut her off angrily. "Don't recite that stupid prophecy to me, it's not real!"

Poppyfur got in her face. "It is real! Just because you're too blind to believe it doesn't mean it's not real! You're ignoring the truth, Dawnfire. You're blinded by your mate and your arrogance."

Anger burned inside Dawnfire, what place to Poppyfur have to say any of this? "Shut up, Poppyfur! You don't know what you're talking about." Dawnfire lashed her tail. "Just because you can never have kits or a mate doesn't mean I can't! I'm the deputy not a medicine cat and my destiny is mine to chose!" Dawnfire spat and turned on her paws, leaving the medicine den without another word. The last time she had done that was when Poppyfur told her of the prophecy.

"You can't escape this prophecy, Dawnfire! No matter how much you want to!" Poppyfur shouted from inside the medicine den, Dawnfire promptly ignored her she stomped away until she came face to face with Flowerstar, the leader had concern bubbling in her green eyes.

"Is everything okay?" Flowerstar questioned, looking into the medicine den. "You two seem to be fighting."

"Fine," Dawnfire lashed her tail, still fuming from Poppyfur. What did the crazy old medicine cat know?

Flowerstar's eyes betrayed doubt. "Come with me, Dawnfire. To my den." Confused, Dawnfire followed her leader to the SunTree, when they got inside Flowerstar told her to sit. "What was that really about?"

Dawnfire sighed, she should probably tell Flowerstar the truth; Flowerstar did know about the prophecy. "Poppyfur told me I shouldn't take a mate because I'm deputy and because of that stupid prophecy but I'm already mates with Lionclaw and I just..." Dawnfire didn't mean to spew all of that out on Flowerstar, but her anger had built up. When she met Flowerstar's gaze the leader didn't look annoyed or angry; just sympathy.

"She's right, you know." Flowerstar said, her voice quiet; shock pierced Dawnfire.

"But--" Flowerstar silenced her.

"You didn't let me finish," Flowerstar said. "She is right, you shouldn't but that doesn't mean you can't. Do you know why Poppyfur says that?"

Dawnfire shook her head. "No, why?" What reason would Poppyfur have to think that? She was a medicine cat, unallowed to have a mate.

"When Poppyfur was still Honeywing's apprentice she made friends with a LichenClan warrior named Branchfur. They became really close friends; but both wanted more. So they started meeting in secret, Poppyfur knew what she was doing was wrong but she was blinded by her love for him." Dawnfire was shocked, she never knew that Poppyfur had a secret mate. Dawnfire remembered Branchfur from gatherings, he had a mate and kits now. What did Poppyfur think of that?

"They continued meeting in secret until LichenClan attacked us, it was a very vicious battle and Honeywing was running low on herbs so she went out to get some, but I'm sure you've heard the story of Honeywing's death." Dawnfire nodded, she had run out and Poppyfur found her dead. "But there's more than what the others know; only four cats know the truth. Poppyfur, Honeywing,

Branchfur and myself. Poppyfur went searching for her mentor and found her along with Branchfur; he was getting ready to attack Honeywing but Poppyfur stopped him. Branchfur demanded that Poppyfur pick either him or her Clan, and when she picked her Clan he killed Honeywing." Dawnfire stared in shock, it was no wonder why Poppyfur thought mates were distraction; her mate killed her mentor.

"I was best friends with Poppyfur so she told me everything, she was distraught and blamed herself for moons. She questioned herself as a medicine cat every day, that is until Pebblestep came along. She adores her apprentice, and has told me that even if she failed as a medicine cat; Pebblestep would be an amazing medicine cat and care for the Clan. I of course told her that she wasn't a failed medicine cat; but I don't think Poppyfur will ever get over the death of Honeywing." Dawnfire felt guilt crawling in her heart.

"I said the most horrible thing to Poppyfur..." Dawnfire said quietly, lowering her head. "I told her that just because she wasn't allowed to have a mate that I shouldn't be able to."

Flowerstar let out a gentle sigh. "It's okay, Dawnfire. There's no way you could've known; she also is clinging to this prophecy, she wants to feel like she's done something right."

"I'm so horrible..." Dawnfire felt sick from the guilt, she wish she could've known about Poppyfur. "I need to go apologize to her."

Flowerstar nodded. "That would probably be best, but Dawnfire," Dawnfire stood up and met her leader's gaze. "Your destiny is what you make it to be, you don't have to follow the path set for you, just be the best warrior you can be and everything will fall into place." Dawnfire twitched her ears, that sounded a lot like something Honeywing once told her.

"Thank you, Flowerstar." Dawnfire turned away and rushed to the medicine den, only to find it empty. Feeling disappointed Dawnfire searched for Pebblestep instead, surely she would know where her mentor was. Dawnfire looked around, but could not spot the medicine cat apprentice either. Where could they be?

Dawnfire's blood turned to ice as she heard an ear splitting yowl of terror. The entire Clan was suddenly on alert, Goldenleaf was closest to the back of camp and the golden she-cat ran outside, Dawnfire was hot on her heels. Dawnfire didn't know what it was, but it sent chills down Dawnfire spine. What had happened? Was it Thornpelt? When Dawnfire saw what had actually happened, she realized it was worse.

Pebblestep stood in terror and shock, her entire body trembled and her eyes were wide with fear and horror and glued on something on the ground. Dawnfire's entire body went numb, it was a mass of cream and black fur. Poppyfur lie lifeless on the ground, her eyes open but glazed over. Dawnfire felt sick to her stomach, was this really happening?

The rest of the Clan started gathering around, all letting out gasps of shock upon seeing Poppyfur's body. Dawnfire heard Flowerstar pushing her way through the crowd of cats. "What's going on--" Flowerstar's voice stopped cold when she saw Poppyfur, Dawnfire saw the leader's entire body go rigid. "Cinderflame...Yarrowtail..." Her voice was quiet. "Take Pebblestep back to the medicine den, I need some warriors to get Poppyfur's body back to camp."

"But what happ--" Rockfur started to speak but Flowerstar silenced him.

"We will worry about that later, for now....take care of Pebblestep." Cinderflame and Yarrowtail quickly moved to their sister's side, guiding her back the medicine den while Bramblepelt and Snakewhisker began moving Poppyfur's body. Dawnfire felt as if her paws were rooted to the ground, she couldn't move and it felt like her heart had stopped beating. Dawnfire stared at where Poppyfur's body had been, she couldn't imagine the medicine cat dead.

When the Clan had cleared out she felt Flowerstar press close. "Dawnfire, come to my den if you want to talk."

"I don't want to talk..." Dawnfire said under her breath, and seemingly without her command Dawnfire took off into the forest, suddenly her body jumped to life and pain and guilt filled her body. After everything she said to Poppyfur, after the way she had treated

the medicine cat, now she was dead and could never apologize. Dawnfire ran for a long time until she couldn't run anymore, she collapsed to the ground panting heavily. "Poppyfur..." her voice choked out. "Poppyfur, I'm sorry!" She wailed. "I didn't mean any of the things I said, I didn't know. I'm sorry, Poppyfur!"

Dawnfire laid in silence for a while before she decided to stand up, her body was sore and her heart ached. She slowly trudged back to camp, she was worried about Pebblestep, and was concerned about what had actually happened to Poppyfur. When she got back into camp she could feel the sadness like a thick cloud emitting from every cat. No cat made eye contact with Dawnfire, and Dawnfire stared at her paws until she got to the medicine den. Poppyfur's body was inside, smelling of lavender. It was Pebblestep putting the herbs in her fur, but her eyes were almost empty. Dawnfire swallowed nervously before speaking to Pebblestep, she looked up.

"Hi, Dawnfire." Pebblestep's voice was sullen and dry. "Are you okay?"

"I care more about if you're okay, Pebblestep." Dawnfire said, trying not to look at Pebblestep's body.

"I will be," Pebblestep stared at her mentor. "I loved this cranky old she-cat." Pebblestep let out a small laugh.

"How did she die?" Dawnfire almost didn't want to ask the question, and she really didn't want the answer.

"Adder bite, she was out gathering herbs by Jagged Rocks and must have gotten bit, she tried dragging herself back to camp but died before she could." Pebblestep sat down heavily, clearly in pain and very sad.

"I'm so sorry," Dawnfire whimpered, she was suddenly a kit again. Her sister, killed by poison as well and because of her. "I got in a fight with Poppyfur and said some terrible things--"

Pebblestep hushed her softly. "It's not your fault, Dawnfire. Poppyfur knows better than to go to Jagged Rocks alone during Greenleaf. Adders are always out." Dawnfire still felt guilt making

her sick. "This is no one's fault, Dawnfire and we can't blame ourselves for the deaths of others; the best we can do is remember them and never forget about them and be grateful for the cats we still have in our lives" Dawnfire met Pebblestep's gaze. "Poppyfur told me that after Dovetail died, I couldn't save my mother and I was blaming myself for a long time until Poppyfur made me wake up. Dovetail was gone, but Cloudspots was still here and now he's a happy and healthy warrior. We lost Poppyfur but we can never forget about her, no matter what."

Dawnfire looked at Poppyfur and thought about words, she told Pebblestep not to blame herself for the death of her mother, and yet she blamed herself for the death of Honeywing. Dawnfire looked back up at Pebblestep. "I'm really sorry about Poppyfur, but I know you'll make an amazing medicine cat Pebblestep."

Pebblestep's eyes were soft, she dipped her head. "Thank you, Dawnfire. I certainly hope I will be."

The Clan prepared the vigil, every cat had a lot of respect for Poppyfur, her loss would be felt by all of SunClan, Dawnfire lay beside the medicine cat's body and looked at her. She really hoped that Poppyfur would forgive her for what she said, Dawnfire's body ached all over and she was so distracted by sorrow that she didn't realize Lionclaw had began resting beside her.

"I'm sorry she died." Lionclaw mewed gently into her ear. "She was a wonderful medicine cat." The golden warrior touched his nose to Dawnfire's cheek. She closed her eyes, breathing in his warm scent.

"She was. I just wish I would've treated her better." Dawnfire fell against Lionclaw. "She's done so much for me, and I ignored her advice." Dawnfire knew that this death wasn't her fault, but there was still a clawing, aching feeling of guilt that tore at her hear. *I may not be responsible, but I was the last cat to talk to her. And I said those terrible things.* Dawnfire lifted her head, gazing into Lionclaw's eyes. *Am I really making a mistake taking him as a mate now that I'm deputy?*

"Everything okay?" Lionclaw asked, meeting her gaze. *This is my path to chose, not any other cat's. I will always love and miss Poppyfur,*

but I need Lionclaw. Dawnfire buried her nose in his golden fur.

"It will be." She breathed, never wanting to leave Lionclaw's side.

Chapter 33

The forest was sullen, the camp feeling even darker than before. Dawnfire's pawsteps were heavy and her sleep was restless. Poppyfur had been dead for several days now, and SunClan still hadn't adjusted. Pebblestep was being responsible as the new SunClan medicine cat, but Dawnfire still felt guilt clawing inside of her. Dawnfire hoped that Honeywing or Poppyfur would come visit her but so far she hadn't had a single dream of anything, she struggled even with falling asleep. Lionclaw had been supportive but Dawnfire couldn't shake what had happened with Poppyfur the day she died off her chest.

And tonight was the gathering, the gathering where SunClan would announce their new warrior, their exiled deputy and the death of their medicine cat. Would SunClan seem stronger or weaker because of it? Either way, Dawnfire really didn't want to go. She didn't have a choice anymore, however, she was the deputy and had to support her Clan and leader in front of the others. She would be strong even though she wanted to run away and hide. While she waited for moonhigh, Dawnfire sent Crowfur, Sandfoot, Snowtail and Brackenpelt on a patrol and Cloudspots, Heatherflight and Adderstrike to go hunting shortly before the gathering.

Both patrols returned, one with little news and one with lots of prey. At least that was good, SunClan wouldn't be short on prey for a while. Dawnfire looked over to the medicine den, Pebblestep's had done her best to keep her hopes and personality alive but Dawnfire knew the young medicine cat was struggling.

It wasn't long before the gathering started and Flowerstar asked a few warriors to stay positioned at camp incase Echoheart decided to pull another attack or Thornpelt came to visit. Dawnfire set Bramblepelt, Redclaw, Snowtail, Adderstrike, and Rainears to stay behind and keep watch, the rest of the Clan was getting ready to head out. Dawnfire was nervous, it had been a whole moon since Thornpelt's exile, and Dawnfire wouldn't just be a warrior; she

would be deputy. What would the other Clans think? Dawnfire knew the MoonClan deputy well, Violetfur was a nice cat and so was the LichenClan deputy, Mossleaf and Dawnfire already knew that Riverstorm would like her; but what would the rest of AshClan think? Dawnfire shuddered, but remembered Lionclaw's words, as long as she did the best for herself and for the Clan she would do just fine.

Flowerstar gathered the Clan, and they set out for the gathering. Dawnfire walked close with Flowerstar, she was the deputy and she wanted it to be known. Lionclaw walked close behind Dawnfire, all of SunClan kept close together; they wouldn't be very warm to AshClan and they were all still sad about Poppyfur. Dawnfire could tell that Pebblestep would be nervous, being the sole SunClan medicine cat; Dawnfire could see it in her eyes because it was the same emotion she was feeling about being deputy.

SunClan crossed the river swiftly and entered the Gathering Hollow, both LichenClan and MoonClan had shown up, but AshClan was nowhere in sight; Dawnfire felt slightly uneasy but knew that Lionstar wouldn't allow a second attack on the SunClan camp, everything would be just fine. Flowerstar made her way to the four trees, she greeted Shadowstar and Jaggedstar, Mossleaf and Violetfur sat close with their leaders; Dawnfire imitated and stayed with Flowerstar.

"Good evening, Flowerstar." Shadowstar dipped his head respectfully, but his amber eyes focused on Dawnfire. "Where is Thornpelt? Nothing tragic I hope?"

Dawnfire felt small under the dark leader's gaze, but stood her ground. She was grateful that Flowerstar spoke so she didn't have to. "I will explain the situation with Thornpelt once the gathering starts."

"Fair enough," Jaggedstar nodded then also looked at Dawnfire. "So, are you the new deputy now?"

Dawnfire noded. "Yes, I am." She fought to keep her voice steady, Jaggedstar was the oldest of the four leaders and had wisdom all over his face.

"I'm sure you'll be a wonderful deputy." Mossleaf purred and Violetfur nodded along.

"You are a good warrior." She said kindly, Dawnfire felt flattered by the compliments and felt her pelt grow hotter.

"Thank you." Dawnfire's attention was torn away when she heard gasps coming from behind her, Jaggedstar and Shadowstar lifted their heads and looked over the crowd of warriors. Flowerstar did the same, and her green eyes suddenly filled with shock. Dawnfire rose to her paws and tried to peer through the cluster of cats; her heart suddenly stopped.

AshClan had arrived, but Lionstar wasn't at the front. Instead, leading the entire Clan with Echoheart at his side was Thornpelt. His amber eyes shimmered with confidence as he made his way through the Clans. Flowerstar confronted him right away, her eyes blazing. "Thornpelt, what are you doing here and why are you with AshClan?"

Thornpelt sneered. "Oh, Flowerstar it's nice to see you too but my name isn't Thornpelt anymore." Dawnfire's heart dropped to her paws. "It's Thornstar and I am leading AshClan for your information."

Flowerstar's whole body tensed. "You are *leading* AshClan? What happened to Lionstar?" Thornpelt, or Thornstar rather shook his head.

"You'll have to find out yourself, but now that I'm here the gathering can begin!" Thornstar lept up onto the AshClan tree, Echoheart followed him with a slash of her tail. Shadowstar and Jaggedstar shared confused looks with their deputies and also took their places. Flowerstar stared after Thornstar for a moment before jumped into the tree, Dawnfire stared at the deputies branch a moment before taking it. She had a view of the entire Gather Hollow, had the situation been different she might actually have enjoyed it, but she couldn't tear her focus away from Thornstar.

Dawnfire could hear cats murmuring questions such as "Why is Thornpelt leading AshClan?" "Why isn't Thornpelt with SunClan?"

"Where's Lionstar and Riverstorm?" Thornstar took a step forward.

"Cats of the Clans," Thornstar spoke boldly. "You may be wondering why I, the former SunClan deputy am leading AshClan and where Lionstar is. Well, I will answer all of your questions." Dawnfire spotted Nightwing and Hawktalon, Hawktalon's head was lowered to the ground as if he was ashamed. "First I will say that Lionstar has joined the ranks of StarClan, we had a fox on our territory and our brave leader died trying to fend it off." *Lying piece of fox dung!* Dawnfire wanted to spit, but held her tongue. "And as for Riverstorm, she did not feel up to leading AshClan so they didn't know what to do. That is until I ran into Echoheart who was distraught over the death of her Clan leader and Riverstorm's decision to back down. We consulted our medicine cat who told us that StarClan predicted a situation like this, and said that it was prophecy that AshClan welcome someone different to be Clan leader and here I am!"

Dawnfire wanted to shred his ears, there is no way that Riverstorm would back down from being leader, Thornstar must have forced her to back down so Echoheart could be his deputy, what did AshClan think of all this? Dawnfire searched for Riverstorm but she was nowhere in sight, neither was Silvermoon.

"You haven't explained why you left SunClan in the first place," Flowerstar said, her voice cold as ice. Thornstar looked at Flowerstar, eyes sparking a challenged. "Thornstar," She growled his new name. "Was responsible for the deaths of Tigertail, Sunstream, Windflight and Blazeheart and attempted to kill me, so he was exiled from SunClan forever." The cats of the Clans let out a gasp, MoonClan and LichenClan shared uneasy glances. "I threw him out of SunClan and made Dawnfire my deputy, a cat who is loyal." Dawnfire felt Thornstar's gaze bore into her like claws, she could sense the hatred flowing off of him.

"And I'm sure that Dawnfire is an exceptional deputy," His voice was grating. "And what's in the past is in the past, I lead AshClan now and SunClan is none of my concern."

Flowerstar tensed very visibly and her eyes flashed fury, but relaxed herself; Dawnfire knew that she would not allow herself to break

truce. "You're right, now would you like to continue sharing your news?" Dawnfire could tell that the Flowerstar was holding a lot back.

Thornstar dipped his head. "Thank you very much, Flowerstar." He sneered, Dawnfire wanted to claw his entire face. "We also welcome to new warriors, Wheatwhisker and Haresong. Made just before Lionstar joined StarClan, we also welcome Puddlepaw, Ravenpaw and Skypaw as apprentices!" Dawnfire grew uneasy, there was no way that those three were six moons yet, Dawnfire searched for them and spotted the three sitting in the back. They were far too small to be apprentices, was Thornstar really forcing young cats to start training?

Flowerstar held her tongue once again, then began reciting her own news. "As you heard, Dawnfire is SunClan's new deputy and her apprentice was made a warrior, we welcome Cloudspots." SunClan welcomed Cloudspots, but the other Clans seemed uncomfortable; Dawnfire wished his becoming a warrior wasn't ruined by Thornpelt. "We also are sad to report the death of Poppyfur, who was bitten by an adder earlier this moon." The hollow grew even more silent with the announcement of Poppyfur's death. Dawnfire couldn't help but notice Branchfur, his eyes betrayed something, she just couldn't name it.

Shadowstar and Jaggedstar both shared their news, but Dawnfire was too distracted with Thornstar to pay much attention to them, how could he force his way into AshClan so easily? Then she realized Echoheart had many followers, and if they followed her they would follow Thornstar. Dawnfire felt sick to her stomach as the gathering ended. Shadowstar and Jaggedstar joined their Clans and Dawnfire jumped down from her position, Pebblestep awkwardly joined her. She had been welcomed by the other medicine cats but no cat knew how to deal with Thornstar. Dawnfire tensed when he approached her and Flowerstar.

"Thank you for such a kind welcome into the rank of the leaders." He said with a sharp edge to his voice, his eyes traveled to Dawnfire. "Knowing you're my replacement, makes me really wonder about the future of SunClan." He shook his head then turned away to join his new Clan, Dawnfire stepped forward to

make a smart remark but Flowerstar stopped her.

"It's not worth it." She said with a twinge of regret in her voice. "He is the leader of AshClan and if they welcomed him, there's nothing we can do. I hate it as much as you do, but we cannot spark a fire with him; or we are just playing into him."

Dawnfire nodded regretfully, lashing her tail. "I know, I just don't want him to use his new power to do something terrible to SunClan."

"Perhaps this is all he wanted, I know it's wishful thinking but it's all we can hope for at this point." Flowerstar shook her head. "We should go." Flowerstar gathered SunClan and they returned to camp, the cats of SunClan looked very annoyed and confused when they returned so naturally they were met with a barrage of questions which luckily, Flowerstar explained so Dawnfire didn't have to. Flowerstar left the Clan to stew and Dawnfire followed her to her den.

"What are we going to do about this?" Dawnfire questioned, her fears suddenly showing through.

"There's nothing we can do," Flowerstar said sternly. "He's leader of AshClan and yes he probably killed Lionstar but we have no proof and there's nothing we can do stop him."

"But--" Flowerstar silenced Dawnfire sharply.

"I'm sorry, Dawnfire but I am not the leader of AshClan and they are not my responsibility, I will not directly act against AshClan unless they act against us first. I know you don't like it, I don't like it either but I refuse to give Thornstar any fuel against us."

Dawnfire sighed heavily, she knew that Flowerstar was right and she hated it. "I understand, Flowerstar and I will support you no matter what."

Flowerstar touched her muzzle to Dawnfire's head. "That's why I chose you as deputy; everything will be just fine, Dawnfire. I promise." Dawnfire met her leader's gaze and wish she could truly

believe that.

Chapter 34

Dawnfire was focused intently on her prey, a small squirrel that nibbled on a nut just mouse lengths in front of her. She extended her claws, inching forward until she was close enough to pounce and kill it.

"Good catch!" Lionclaw praised behind her, Dawnfire buried her kill and sat up to face him.

"Thanks." She dipped her head and sniffed the air, prey was faint but it was there. Dawnfire spotted Icepetal off in the distance hunting prey as well. It had been two moons since Thornstar showed himself at the gathering as AshClan's new leader and nothing had happened since. AshClan did their daily patrols as per usual and it almost seemed like nothing was wrong, but Dawnfire knew that trouble was brewing and Dawnfire didn't know what it was, but she wanted to be prepared for it. Greenleaf was drawing to a close and Leaf-fall would be here soon; and Leaf-bare would be shortly after.

Dawnfire had been right in making SunClan hunt as much prey as they could; it was already running slower but SunClan had a reliable stock. They only continued to hunt more, and Dawnfire was always sending the best hunters. She had adjusted to being deputy, and was now only concerned with Thornstar and AshClan.

"Hey, come back to SunClan." Lionclaw nudged her slightly, snapping her out of her focus. His amber eyes were soft, ever since Poppyfur's death, Dawnfire had pulled a bit away from him but he had been supportive all the same, Dawnfire felt guilty about the way she had been acting. Dawnfire nuzzled him.

"I'm sorry, I was distracted." Lionclaw nuzzled back, clearly understanding she meant more than just the hunting.

Lionclaw pressed close against her. "It's alright, I understand." He

intertwined their tails licked her cheek. "We should spend some time together tonight, like we did that one night."

Dawnfire touched his nose with hers. "I would love that." Lionclaw purred and continued with his hunting. Once again, Dawnfire realized how much she missed being around him, Flowerstar told her that it was her choice to make and Dawnfire wanted to have a mate, Lionclaw made her feel stronger and helped her think, and she wanted to keep him in her life.

Each one of them caught one more piece of prey before heading back into camp, when they returned the sun was starting to set , Dawnfire and Lionclaw shared a piece of prey before exiting the camp to the spot they had gone to before. The nights were colder, but they kept each other warm.

"You're being a wonderful deputy, by the way." Lionclaw said softly. "Keeping every cat busy and keeping an eye on the AshClan border."

Dawnfire sighed quietly. "I hope so, I want to be prepared for if...when Thornstar decides to try something. I know he will."

Lionclaw rasped his tongue on the top of her head. "We all do, and when he does we'll be prepared. Chances are he'll send his warriors to attack us, and when he does I'll kick his tail like I did the last time." Lionclaw puffed out his chest, Dawnfire let out a laugh and nuzzled into him.

"I know you will." Dawnfire mewed quietly, staring up at the stars. She had still to hear anything from Honeywing or Poppyfur, but she hoped that they knew that she was trying her best to take care of the Clan they each loved so much. Dawnfire wasn't as guilt ridden about Poppyfur's death, but it still snuck up on her from time to time, that and the prophecy. That was another subject she didn't like thinking about. She wanted to focus on Lionclaw, and that's what she did. They spent the rest of the night together, it was almost dawn when they headed back.

The two of them walked side-by-side into camp and Dawnfire heard rustling from the nursery and she did so. She stopped to look, it was Applespots but she normally wasn't this active this early, no cat

was. Curious, Dawnfire approached the nursery and Lionclaw followed her.

"Thrushkit? Cherrykit? Briarkit?" They heard Applespots' distressed mew from inside. "Where are you?" A moment later she ran out. "My kits are missing!" She cried when she saw Dawnfire and Lionclaw.

"Hold on, Applespots." Dawnfire tried to calm the frantic queen and she searched for her lost kits. "You know, Thrushkit he might have just wandered off with his sisters. We will find them." Dawnfire turned to Lionclaw. "Can you go wake Yarrowtail and Cloudspots, they are our best trackers and I want two search teams for these kits." Lionclaw didn't hesitate, he just nodded and bounded off to the warrior den. Dawnfire turned her attention back to Applespots, he cries had woken the other three kits in the nursery. Earthkit stumbled over her brother into the open.

"What's going on?" She yawned. "It's so early."

"Nothing, Earthkit." Dawnfire said calmly. "Go back inside with Rosekit and your brother." Dawnfire told her, the sleep deprived kit nodded and stumbled back into the nursery, Fawnheart and Squirreltail came out after her.

"What's happening?" Fawnheart questioned, looking at Applespots with concern and confusion.

"My kits are missing." Applespots whimpered, clearly trying to keep her calm, the other two queens rushed to her side trying soothe her. Fawnheart looked up to Dawnfire.

"Are you setting up patrols?" She questioned, Dawnfire nodded and looked over to the warriors den just as Lionclaw was guiding out two teams of cats. "I'm going to go wake Flowerstar, she needs to know. Cloudspots you lead a team and Yarrowtail you lead one, check every inch of the the territory until you find them." The two warriors nodded and separated into their two teams while Dawnfire bounded over to Flowerstar's den and roused the sleeping leader. She quickly woke up and asked about everything, Dawnfire explained how she had already sent two teams.

"Very good thinking, Dawnfire." Flowerstar pushed out of her den and hurried to Applespots's side. "Don't worry, Applespots. I promise we will find your kits and bring them home safely." Flowerstar stayed by the queen's side and Dawnfire sat very impaitently in camp. She wished she would've gone but she wanted to be the one to tell Flowerstar. Dawnfire really hoped that these kits just got curious and wandered off, but deep inside her she feared something else.

Yarrowtail's team returned first, his eyes very irritated and concerned. Applespots ran to his side. "What did you find?" She demanded. "Did you find them?"

"Kind of," Yarrowtail shifted his paws awkwardly. Flowerstar padded over to him.

"What did you find?" She asked quietly, as if she feared the worse.

"We found the scent of the kits as well as another cat, we followed the trail but didn't realize what it meant until we got to the AshClan border..."

"Thornstar!" Dawnfire spat, digging her claws into the dirt. She knew it was him, she just didn't want to admit it. "He came here and stole the kits!"

"Dawnfire and Lionclaw, I want you to come with me." Flowerstar declared, Dawnfire was confused.

"What for, where are we going?"

"AshClan camp, I said I wouldn't act until he did and now he has. I'm going to demand he give the kits back."

"What if he doesn't?" Lionclaw questioned with a twitch of his paws.

"We force him too." Flowerstar turned away and began heading toward the camp entrance, Dawnfire and Lionclaw had no choice but to follow. The small patrol ran through SunClan territory and marched straight over AshClan's border, Dawnfire didn't think she had ever seen Flowerstar so angry. They slowed their pace while in AshClan territory but Flowerstar walked with a purpose. The first

cat they encountered was a dawn patrol of Graypelt, Cloverstrike, Ratpelt and Grasstail, all cats that had been in the fight on the full moon.

"I don't recall inviting SunClan to parade into AshClan territory." Graypelt growled, unsheathing his claws.

"And I don't recall giving our kits to AshClan, now let me speak to your leader." Flowerstar spat back, Graypelt and Cloverstrike shared a glance.

"Fine, Flowerstar but you better not try anything; or you'll regret it." Cloverstrike sneered.

"Do not threaten me." Flowerstar growled, lashing her tail. Graypelt chuckled and led the three warriors into the AshClan camp. Dawnfire had never been to AshClan's camp before, most of the dens were reinforced with thick brambles and the camp was shaded by towering pine trees. Thornstar sat in the center of camp; he had been waiting for them.

"Greetings, Flowerstar!" He greeted with a fake kindness. "What brings you to AshClan camp?"

"You know exactly what, you thieving foxheart." Flowerstar growled, taking both Lionclaw and Dawnfire aback.

"You come into my camp and insult me." Thornstar shook his head. "Not very respectful are we, Flowerstar?"

"You stole kits from SunClan, you crossed our territory to steal from us."

"Correction," Thornstar stepped forward, his eyes flashing dangerously. "I took *my* kits where they belong."

"They belong with their mother." Flowerstar growled, Dawnfire could see the fur on her spine rising.

"What would you know, you never got to have kits." Thornstar sneered, making Flowerstar even more visibly angry.

"Either give the kits back or SunClan will fight for them." Flowerstar declared. "You won't take them from us."

Thornstar laughed. "Where was this vigor when I was in SunClan?" Thornstar met Flowerstar's gaze. "Very well, Flowerstar. I will meet you at sunhigh with my answer at the AshClan and SunClan border."

Flowerstar lashed her tail. "You better do the right thing, Thornstar or you will regret it." She hissed.

"I won't regret anything, I still have nine lives to lose. How many do you have left? Can't be much." His eyes flashed threateningly, this time Dawnfire stepped forward.

"You will not take any of her lives, Thornstar." She spat at the AshClan leader.

"Really? Are you going to stop me, Dawnfire?"

"I will." Lionclaw stepped forward, extending his claws and making himself seem even bigger. "I've done it once before."

"Ah yes," Thornstar shook his head. "You are very strong, Lionclaw. You got more of me than your idiot father." Lionclaw looked as if he were about to attack but Flowerstar stopped him.

"We will not fight in AshClan's camp, we wouldn't stand a chance. We will meet you at the border at sunhigh." Flowerstar said sternly.

"Wise choice." Thornstar chuckled. "Now, I would like the dawn patrol to continue and to escort our guests to the border." The patrol did as commanded, and as they moved through AshClan territory Dawnfire kept an eye on Flowerstar, her pale eyes betrayed fear, anger and many other emotions. Dawnfire could understand why, Thornstar had stolen kits from SunClan and it didn't matter if they were his or not.

"Here we are," Graypelt said as they reached the border and the three of them crossed it. "See you at sunhigh, Flowerstar." He sneered and led his patrol away.

"Are we really going to fight at sunhigh?" Dawnfire asked Flowerstar, trying to ignore the concern in her voice.

"More than likely, Thornstar won't just give up those kits no matter how much we want him to." Flowerstar said with a heavy voice. "We need to tell the Clan, I want all battle ready cats because chances are Thornstar will be doing the same."

They headed back to the camp and began preparing the Clan for battle, Applespots had yet to leave the nursery and Squirrletail and Fawnheart were keeping her company. Dawnfire was filled with concern, she didn't want to fight because she knew that Thornstar would command his warriors not to hold anything back, an entire Clan would be fighting to kill. Dawnfire would give anything for Thornstar to have a sudden change of conscious, but deep down inside she knew that was impossible, they would be fighting and cats could die.

Chapter 35

SunClan faced the border, Flowerstar at the head of her warriors and Thornstar at the head of his. With the amount of cats Dawnfire saw, she knew that he had chosen to fight for the kits. Thornstar's tail twitched slightly with anticipation.

"So this is your answer," Flowerstar closed her eyes with a small sigh. "Very well, Thornstar." Flowerstar extended her claws. "SunClan! Attack!" The battle started in the blink of an eye, yowling filled the noon air and the two Clans collided. Dawnfire was pinned down in an instant by Cloverstrike, she felt claws digging into her shoulders. Dawnfire battered at the she-cat's belly and twisted away from her grip. Cloverstrike lashed her forepaw out, her claws nearly slicing her nose. Dawnfire stumbled backwards, her hind paws tripping over a branch. Dawnfire fell hard on her back and Cloverstrike used the opportunity to attack.

Dawnfire rolled away, scolding herself for a moment for her mistake then turning back to her fight. Dawnfire's claws met Cloverstrike's side and she tore through brown fur, blood welled from the marks in her side. Cloverstrike let out a hiss of pain and slashed her claws across Dawnfire's cheek. Dawnfire hissed and shoved Cloverstrike away, quickly following up but leaping on her and pinning the AshClan she-cat down.

Dawnfire had Cloverstrike pinned until she felt a force grab her and throw her off, Dawnfire bumped her head on a rock, she quickly stood up and saw Nightstorm had come to her aid. Dawnfire braced herself for the attack of both she-cats. Nightstorm came from one side and Cloverstrike the other, Dawnfire tried to pull away from them but was dropped to the ground with claws digging into her flank. Dawnfire hissed and managed to get a good attack on Nightstorm's leg, but Cloverstrike was quick to hit back. Dawnfire spat at the brown she-cat and rolled away, trying to avoid Nightstorm's claws. There was a flash of gray and Nightstorm was thrown to the ground with Cinderflame standing over her, pelt

bristling and claws digging into Nightstorm's shoulder.

Cloverstrike went after her but Dawnfire met her halfway, pulling the AshClan warrior to the ground, clawing her flank as she did so. Cloverstrike threw Dawnfire off, causing her to stumble into Cinderflame who batted away at Nightstorm. The two AshClan she-cats kept attacking, tearing their claws into Dawnfire and Cinderflame's pelts, but the SunClan she-cats fought back just as hard. Dawnfire batted at Cloverstrike's paws, causing her stumble and hit the ground. Cinderflame jumped onto her, raking claws down her spine. Nightstorm violently shoved Cinderflame off into Dawnfire, the two she-cats stumbled and Nightstorm dragged Cloverstrike away. Dawnfire looked at Cinderflame and nodded thankfully, the gray she-cat was quickly back into the battle.

Dawnfire took a moment to breath and inspect her wounds, her fur was stained red but no wounds were too deep, just stinging but the racing adrenaline through her body was enough to keep it from being unbearable. Dawnfire also took this moment to asses the battle, Adderstrike and Icepetal fought side by side against Mudthorn and Graypelt, Icepetal's white fur had patches of scarlet, and a claw mark across her side. Snowtail wrestled with Leafwind and not far away from them, Sandfoot was in an intense battle with Featherfall. Dawnfire looked for any cats that might be in trouble and found Cloudspots fighting against Echoheart, one eyes was closed shut with blood and he had claw marks across his flank.

Anger sparked inside Dawnfire and she made it to Echoheart in a few bounds, she dug her claws deep into Echoheart's lower back and pulled her back away from the apprentice, the AshClan deputy spun around and slashed Dawnfire's cheek. Murder flashed in her eyes and Dawnfire soon found herself pinned, she struggled under Echoheart's grip, but before she could kill Dawnfire she let out a hiss of pain and anger. Cloudspots had given Echoheart a nasty scratch down her spine, the gray she-cat leapt off Dawnfire and onto Cloudspots, digging her teeth into his scruff and throwing him hard against a tree, Cloudspots hit the ground and did not move.

Dawnfire scrambled to her paws, and moved to attack Echoheart again. This time, letting anger and hatred drive her claws. Dawnfire's claws met Echoheart's shoulder and she tore through

flesh and fur as hard as she could, Echoheart let out a cry of pain and raked claws down Dawnfire's already scarred shoulder. The two she-cats engaged in a violent fight, both fueled by anger. Echoheart got a grip on Dawnfire's shoulder and shoved her to the side, but instead of attacking her she let out a laugh.

"You fight better when you're angry." Echoheart lashed her tail. "Is there actually a cat in there capable of killing another?"

Dawnfire spat at her, digging her claws into the soil. "I will not kill unless it's absolutely necessary, I'm not a murderer like you."

"Funny you say that, Dawnfire." Something menacing sparked inside Echoheart's dark eyes. "Your medicine cat died recently, right?" Dawnfire didn't answer, she just hissed with anger. What did she care about Poppyfur? "Such a shame you've lost so many cats close to you, but I think there might be one more." Dawnfire was confused, but then her eyes when to Echoheart's paws, they were stained with heavy amounts of blood. Cloudspots hadn't bled that much....Suddenly an image flashed her mind, Dawnfire tore past Echoheart and kept her eyes peeled for a mottled pelt.

"Turtleblaze!" She called her brothers name, but she couldn't find any trace of Turtleblaze. Dread and panic rushed through her body, all of her muscles tensed and she saw no sign of her brother. Dawnfire ran through the battlefield. "Turtleblaze!" She called his name over and over, she stumbled over her paws, running through the chaotic battle. "Turtleblaze!" She called one more time.

"Dawnfire! What's wrong?" Much to her relief, Turtleblaze ran up to her; green eyes filled with concern. Dawnfire looked over his body, a few scratches but nothing critical. Dawnfire sighed in relief.

"I couldn't find you," She said quietly. "Echoheart said but I don--" Dawnfire stopped dead, Echoheart talking about killing someone Dawnfire cared about but it wasn't Turtleblaze. Her blood turned to ice. "Where's Lionclaw?" She asked urgently, her voice shaking.

Turtleblaze looked around. "I saw him near the border a while ago, fighting with Echoheart--" Dawnfire didn't give him a moment to finish, she spun around on her paws and started sprinting towards

the border. Her heart pounded and fear weighed down her paws, but Dawnfire kept running. Through the trees she saw golden fur and her heart lightened, but she she broke through the brush it completely stopped.

Lionclaw lie on the forest floor, bleeding from a gaping wound on his stomach, he was not moving. Dawnfire's run slowed until she stopped walking completely, the grass below his body was stained crimson. Dawnfire moved forward, suddenly the world around her slowed down and the sound of the fighting dulled into a small buzz into her ears. Dawnfire stared at Lionclaw, her entire body shaking. He couldn't be dead, anyone but him!

"Dawnfire!" The world suddenly jumped to life and Dawnfire turned to see Turtleblaze, his eyes wide at the sight of Lionclaw. "I'm going to get Pebblestep." Dawnfire almost said it wasn't worth it then she saw Lionclaw's paw twitch, he was still alive! Dawnfire dropped to his side and touched her nose to his, his breaths were extremely shallow but it was there.

Pebblestep came sprinting through the trees with a bundle of herbs in her jaws, Dawnfire stumbled to the side to make room for the medicine cat. Dawnfire couldn't remove her eyes from the cat she loved, she gave everything she had in a prayer to StarClan that he would live.

Pebblestep's paws worked quick, she chewed marigold and put loads of cobwebs on his wound. "I need more..." She said under her breath. "I need my den." She said, the medicine cat looked at Turtleblaze. "Go find Flowerstar, tell her what's happened and tell her to draw SunClan back, we have to retreat I need to get Lionclaw home." Turtleblaze hesitated but Pebblestep hissed. "Go. Now!" He spun on his paws and vanished into the forest. Dawnfire slowly moved closer.

"Will he be okay?" Dawnfire's voice cracked, Pebblestep looked at her with pain in her eyes.

"I need time." Dawnfire stepped back and just watched Pebblestep struggle with her herbs to stop the bleeding. It wasn't long before Dawnfire heard Flowerstar's voice calling to retreat, Pebblestep

heard it as well and with a twitch of her hears she looked at Dawnfire. "Help me get him back to my den, I will be able to work better in there.

Dawnfire's legs were shaking she she helped to carry her dying mate back to the camp, knowing that any second he could stop breathing and join the ranks of StarClan, but Dawnfire was holding on to the little breaths he was letting out. They got him to the medicine cat den as fast as they could and Pebblestep told Dawnfire to get out.

"I'm not leaving." Dawnfire said stubbornly.

"Get out!" Pebblestep spat. "I need room to work without you fretting over him! So go! Do something useful!" Dawnfire hesitate, she gave one last glance at Lionclaw's body before Pebblestep spat at her again. Dawnfire dragged her paws as she went into the camp, she felt as if her heart was shattering into a million pieces. Dawnfire sat down outside the medicine den, staring at her paws. Her body ached, but her heart ached more. After all the cats StarClan had taken from her, Willowkit, Sunstream, her parents, Poppyfur....surely they wouldn't take the cat she loved? Or would they?

Dawnfire's ears twitched and she looked up to see Applespots in an intense argument with Flowerstar. "Why would you retreat? You could've won! You just gave up my kits!"

"Applespot I had no choice--" Flowerstar tried arguing but the queen continued yelling.

"Yes you did! Why would you even consider--"

"Lionclaw is dying right now." Dawnfire spoke up, giving Applespots an annoyed look. "Echoheart tried to kill him and now Pebblestep's is doing everything she can to save his life and stop him from bleeding out in the medicine cat den."

Applespots stopped, her eyes flashing alarm for a moment. She looked at Flowerstar, then back to Dawnfire, and after a moment she stormed away, hiding away in the nursery. Dawnfire looked back at her paws, she barely heard Flowerstar approach. "I'm sorry

about Lionclaw, but you know that Pebblestep will do everything she can to save him."

"I know, Flowerstar." Dawnfire couldn't force herself to show any kind of emotion, she didn't know what to feel other than terror and pain. She could very lose the cat she loved tonight, what would happen if Lionclaw died? Dawnfire couldn't even imagine a life without him, everything seemed so dull without him. Hunting, patrolling everything. Perhaps Poppyfur was right, and having a mate would only cause trouble. Dawnfire's heart hurt even more at that thought, she was glad she had Lionclaw in her life; she just couldn't bare the thought of losing him.

The day went on, the sun slowly fell out of the sky and Dawnfire did not move from her spot. Not a single cat tried to talk to her, and the only cat who entered the medicine den had been Flowerstar who got some herbs to treat the other wounded cats. It wasn't until the moon was high in the sky that Turtleblaze approached her.

"You need sleep." Was all he said, in a quiet voice. Dawnfire looked up to meet his gaze.

"I don't want to sleep, I'm going to wait out here until I hear something about Lionclaw." She argued.

Turtleblaze sighed softly. "Listen, Dawnfire. You're not doing any good by sitting out here alone. There's nothing you can do right now but wait, it's up to Pebblestep and StarClan at this point." Dawnfire looked away, trying to swallow the pain in her throat. "But come to the warriors den, get some sleep and in the morning you can see how he is doing."

"Or I can tell you right now." Dawnfire jumped and turned to face Pebblestep, it was the most movement she had done since she returned to camp.

"Pebblestep! Is he okay? Is alive? Is he--" Pebblestep silenced Dawnfire's rambling with a flick of her tail.

"Please calm down, Dawnfire. I've stopped the bleeding, but his breathing is rough and he hasn't woken up. He was badly injured,

and I've done all I can for now. It's up to StarClan now."

"There's nothing more you can do? There has to be something..." Dawnfire's voice cracked.

"No, Dawnfire. I'm sorry. I'll keep an eye on him all night and if anything happens, you'll be the first to know." Pebblestep dipped her head. "Now get some sleep, if you can't sleep I can give you some poppy seeds."

"I don't want anything." Dawnfire turned away, she heard Turtleblaze say something to Pebblestep then run after her.

"Will you sleep now?" Turtleblaze asked.

"I won't be able to and you know it." Dawnfire grumbled, stopping her walk and looking her brother in the eyes.

"Please, just try." Turtleblaze pleaded, his eyes filled with concern and sadness. Dawnfire nodded slowly and followed him into the warriors den, Dawnfire curled up in her nest and her body was grateful for the rest but Dawnfire's entire soul hurt. The den felt incredibly empty without Lionclaw, she felt cold and very much alone. She had left so much up to StarClan, and all they had done was take away her sister and parents. Dawnfire clawed the bracken at her nest, if anyone was going to help Lionclaw, it would be Lionclaw. He would never give up, even as he battled death.

Chapter 36

Dawnfire hadn't slept, and her heart ached with fear and pain. She crawled out of the warrior's den as dawn broke but saw that Snakewhisker had already woken up. The gray tom's green eyes filled with sadness and sympathy.

"Both Flowerstar and I want you to take a short break from your deputy duties, she understands you want to be there for Lionclaw." Dawnfire looked at Snakewhisker, then cast a glance at the SunTree, she felt like arguing but knew that she wouldn't be at her best and all she wanted to do was mope around camp anyway.

"Thank you, Snakewhisker." Dawnfire dipped her head and looked at the medicine den, she wondered if Pebblestep would be awake yet. She slowly approached the den and peered inside, sure enough Pebblestep was awake and sniffing Lionclaw's wounds. His chest and stomach were covered in thick layers of cobweb. Pebblestep heard her approach and turned around, she flicked her ears.

"You can come see him, I actually wanted to talk to you." Pebblestep said, Dawnfire took a slow step forward. The heavy scent of herbs wafted off of Lionclaw. Dawnfire couldn't take her eyes off of him, he almost looked like he was completely still, but she spotted the very slow rise and fall of his sides. Dawnfire sat beside him, she looked at him, pain running through her heart.

"How is he?" Dawnfire asked quietly, looking over every inch of his golden fur. Never wanting to forget a single strand.

"No better no worse." Pebblestep said before standing up and moving to face Dawnfire.

"Then what did you want to talk to me about?" Dawnfire asked curiously, if it wasn't about Lionclaw's condition then what else could it be?

"Have you been eating more than usual?" Dawnfire gave Pebblestep

a bewildered look. *Is she calling me fat?* Dawnfire shook her head.

"What? Why are you even asking that?"

Pebblestep reached a paw out and placed her forepaw on Dawnfire's stomach, a mixture of joy, fear, sadness and compassion. "It's just as I thought..." Pebblestep stepped back. "I noticed it a few days ago, but yesterday when you were sitting outside I really saw it." Dawnfire flattened her ears, what in the name of StarClan was she talking about? "You're expecting kits, Dawnfire."

The world went silent, Pebblestep's words seemed to echo in her ears. The world slowed down, and suddenly Dawnfire was alone with Pebblestep, she stared the medicine cat in the eyes. Her blue eyes sparkled with emotion, she waited for a response. Kits. Dawnfire looked at her stomach, it was slightly larger than normal. She stared, could she feel moving? Or was it her mind. There were kits inside her, Lionclaw's kits. Dawnfire's thoughts began to race, a litter of tiny kits. Golden and golden brown, running around and playing with their father. Letting out squeaks of joy and happiness as Lionclaw taught them how to be warriors.

Color slowly ebbed back into Dawnfire's world, she broke Pebblestep's gaze and looked at Lionclaw, his still body breathing slowly. Dawnfire stepped closer to him, crouching close to him. "Kits, huh?" She said softly.

"I know it's difficult to take in--" Dawnfire stopped Pebblestep mid sentence, she twitched her tail.

"Can I have a moment with Lionclaw please?" Dawnfire questioned, Pebblestep didn't respond but Dawnfire heard her gentle pawsteps leave the medicine den. Dawnfire looked over Lionclaw, he looked so peaceful. Like he was just sleeping, and Dawnfire was really hoping he would wake up soon. Dawnfire touched her nose to his, she could feel is slow, yet warm breaths. "Lionclaw..." She said softly, barely above a whisper. "You have to wake up, okay? You have to come back from this. I can't lose you, Lionclaw not now." Pain choked her words. "We're gonna have kits...little golden warriors just like you, Lionclaw. They are going to be the best warriors the forest has ever seen, just like their father. You have to

wake up, I can't do this without you..." Other than a twitch of his paw, Lionclaw didn't respond. Dawnfire let out a pained sigh and rose to her paws. She decided she needed to tell Flowerstar, and her brother.

Dawnfire turned and exited the medicine cat den, Pebblestep was outside talking with Cinderflame and Yarrowtail. She looked up and gave a nod at Pebblestep, Dawnfire dipped her head back and walked slowly towards the SunTree. What would Flowerstar say? There was nothing she could do, Dawnfire would be having these kits and couldn't be deputy while in the nursery. Dawnfire approached the SunTree, swallowing her fear she peered into the dim den. "Flowerstar?"

"Come in, Dawnfire." Flowerstar's mew was gentle, it had been her who told Snakewhisker to take over deputy duties for the time being. Dawnfire stepped inside, ducking her head in the shade, Flowerstar was lying in her nest, paws tucked neatly under her chest; pale eyes glowing kindly. "What do you need?"

Dawnfire sat down, tail twitching nervously. "Well, I just got done talking to Pebblestep." She began, looking at her paws.

"How is Lionclaw?" Flowerstar asked, voice twinging with concern. "Has anything changed with him?"

Dawnfire shook her head. "No, he's still unconscious. There's something else though..." Flowerstar tilted her head slightly. "I'm expecting kits."

There was an intense silence between the two of them, Dawnfire could've sworn it lasted moons until Flowerstar finally spoke. "I see." Dawnfire ducked her head, fear filling her chest. "How do you feel about this?"

Dawnfire looked up, somewhat surprised at the question. "I don't know, I mean...I love Lionclaw and I would be more than happy to raise kits with him but if he doesn't make it...." Her voice cracked, she didn't want to think about if Lionclaw never woke up.

"I understand your fears, Dawnfire." Flowerstar stood up and moved

closer. "But you have to put your faith in StarClan, because no matter what they will guide you and what is meant to happen will happen."

Dawnfire looked at her leader, incredibly grateful for her words of wisdom. She felt like an apprentice again, but quickly realized that her apprentice days were far behind her. She was going to be a mother, and they would soon be apprentices. Dawnfire closed her eyes. "I believe that, and I am more than ready to raise these kits."

Flowerstar's eyes sparkled with pride and admiration. "You will be a fantastic mother, Dawnfire. I know you will."

Dawnfire bid farewell to Flowerstar, feeling better about her future kits. Next was to tell Turtleblaze, she searched the camp for her brother and found him just outside the nursery talking to Fawnheart. Dawnfire slowly trotted up to them, still somewhat nervous but she knew that Turtleblaze would be excited, no matter his feelings for Lionblaze.

"Turtleblaze, I have something to tell you." Dawnfire said as he approached, both he and Fawnheart turned to look at her, confusion in her eyes. Before he could ask what it was she blurted it out. "I'm expecting Lionclaw's kits."

Turtleblaze and Fawnheart stared at her in shock for a long while, until Fawnheart's eyes softened. "Well it's about time." She purred, Dawnfire let out a small laugh of relief.

"Lionclaw's kits...?" Turtleblaze's eyes were distant for a moment, then focused in and filled with joy. "Then that lazy furball better wake up here soon." Dawnfire let out a laugh and nuzzled her brother, it was the first time she had laughed in a long time, it felt good.

Applespots and Squirreltail overheard the conversation, and from then on it spread like wildfire. The Clan was excited for even more kits, and they all started rooting for Lionclaw to wake up. Dawnfire visited him two more times that day before she decided to rest, she was more willing to sleep now that she was carrying kits with her. She had curled up in her nest for the night ready for sleep, when

she heard an urgent mew call her name.

It was Pebblestep, she was instantly on alert and bolting out of the warriors den. The pain and fear she had felt earlier filled her chest like a flooded river and she looked around in a panic. Pebblestep stood before her, but her eyes weren't sad. They were filled with joy, she turned and ran towards the medicine den becokinging Dawnfire to follow her, Dawnfire bounded after her as fast as she could. She skidded to a stop inside the medicine den when she saw that Lionclaw's head was lifted, his eyes were dull but still open.

"Lionclaw!" She exclaimed his name and hurried to his side, nuzzling him. Joy, happiness and relief took away all her pain and fear, her breaking heart was reforming faster than she could deal with. Lionclaw let out a weak chuckle and nuzzled her back. "I'm so glad you're okay." She breathed out, heart pounding in her chest. Dawnfire couldn't handle the joy she felt that he was alive, she wouldn't be raising her kits alone, they would have their father and everything would be perfect.

"I'm glad I'm okay too." His voice cracked, he was clearly still weak but his eyes still have a faint glow to them. "I was having a dream about kits and something...I just knew I couldn't give up; I had to come back to you." His eyes burned with love, Dawnfire's heart ached with the same love.

"How interesting that you had that dream..." She laughed to herself, when Lionclaw looked confused she finally said. "I'm expecting your kits, Lionclaw. You're going to be a father." His amber eyes went wide, he looked at Pebblestep who nodded and Dawnfire could see the joy jump through his body.

"Really? We're gonna have kits? Together?" He moved in an excited manner but Pebblestep stopped him.

"You're still badly injured, no sudden movements or you could reopen that wound." She scolded, but had a tenderness to her mew.

"Dawnfire I--, I'm so happy." He nuzzled close to her, Dawnfire could feel his breaths; now faster and full of life. Dawnfire was genuinely happy inside, she was going to have beautiful kits and

the cat she loved so dearly was alive; for the first time in moons she felt as if everything would be absolutely perfect.

Chapter 37

Dawnfire had grown used to sleeping in a smaller den, as well as being woken up by roudy kits. Mostly Earthkit demanded Mudkit and Rosekit to play. However, she enjoyed the company of Fawnheart and Squirreltail, but Applespots hadn't gotten over the loss of her kits, and was still angry that Flowerstar had given up the battle. She refused to return to her warrior duties and remained in the nursery. Dawnfire felt sorry for the queen, after learning her mate had betrayed the entire Clan then stole her kits away from her, it couldn't be easy.

Dawnfire's own mate was recovering slowly in the medicine cat den. He could walk to and from the fresh-kill pile, medicine den and dirt pile but not much else. Pebblestep restricted his movements to that alone so his wound could heal properly, Lionclaw hated nothing more than that but Dawnfire visited him as often as she could. While Dawnfire had moved to the nursery, she still kept her deputy duties; sending out patrols but not joining them. She was still deputy, just didn't leave the camp. She was about a moon along and her belly was getting rounder everyday.

She could feel the kits growing inside her and while sometimes she was uncomfortable, she was more than excited to meet her kits. She imagined everyday what they would look like, and how many there would be. There was hardly a time where she wasn't thinking of her kits, she knew Lionclaw was excited as well; constantly asking how she felt and if she was in pain. He would talk about teaching his kits to be the best warriors, and how they would be so incredible. Dawnfire loved to see how happy he was too, it gave her a lot of hope for the future of her kits.

Even the threat of Thornstar hadn't gotten under her pelt in quite a few days, she felt like she could do anything and would do anything. She had even more to protect now, soon there would be kits looking to her for protection and she would do everything to make sure they were safe. Dawnfire would like to see Thornstar or

Echoheart take this away from her, Echoheart had almost ruined everything and she was going to pay; but for now Dawnfire was focusing on her kits and the life she would be living after they would be born. She assumed she would still do what she does now, giving the deputy orders but focusing on her kits.

The days had been easy and peaceful, AshClan hadn't started any more trouble, but Dawnfire did wonder how Applespots's kits were doing, she did worry for their wellbeing and the way they would end up under Thornstar's rule; especially Thrushkit.

Dawnfire was sunning herself outside, lying on herself so she didn't lie on her belly. Earthkit was wrestling with Mudkit as Rosekit cheered her on. Dawnfire enjoyed watching them play, and soon there would be even more kits. If only there were three others; Dawnfire did truly miss the three kits and the camp seemed dimmer without them.

Dawnfire was just about to doze off when some cat let out an angry yowl, Dawnfire's eyes shot open and she saw Cinderflame, Yarrowtail and Pebblestep facing their father, Rockfur whose pelt bristled. Cinderflame's eyes burned with anger, while Yarrowtail and Pebblestep's showed pure shock. Flowerstar exited her den, Dawnfire rose to her paws with a heave. "What's going on?" She asked.

"We found Rockfur talking to Thornstar!" Cinderflame spat, gasps rang out through the camp, Dawnfire stared at the dark gray tom.

"I was simply having a conversation with an old friend!" Rockfur spat at his daughter, but took a step back from her.

"On SunClan territory!" Cinderflame stepped after him, lashing her tail. "You invited Thornstar onto our territory and told him SunClan secrets!" Flowerstar stepped forward before Cinderflame could yell more.

"Cinderflame, what was he saying?" Flowerstar asked calmly.

Instead of Cinderflame, it was Yarrowtail who replied. "He told him about Lionclaw and that Dawnfire is expecting kits and that she

couldn't be a proper deputy anymore."

"Then Thornstar told him it was his turn to be deputy of SunClan." Cinderflame added sharply. "He's been talking to Rockfur this entire time!"

Flowerstar closed her eyes for a moment then turned to Rockfur, flicking her tail. "Rockfur, is this true?"

Rockfur opened his mouth but Cinderflame growled. "Don't even try to deny it!" Flowerstar hushed her harshly.

"Cinderflame, please." Flowerstar turned back to Rockfur. "Well?" The dark gray tom looked terrified and angry, then lashed his tail.

"Yes! It's true!" Rockfur spat, Dawnfire and the rest of the SunClan were taken aback. "I've been visiting Thornstar ever since he became leader of AshClan, he wants nothing but the best for SunClan ahd Dawnfire is not it!"

Dawnfire flattened her ears. "It's not Thornstar's place to say whether I'm a good deputy or not." She stood her ground.

"What kind of deputy leaves her position to have kits?" Rockfur demanded, eyes burning like embers.

"It wasn't exactly planned!" Dawnfire hissed, Flowerstar raised her voice.

"Silence!" She stared down Rockfur. "Rockfur, I refuse to allow treason in my Clan. If you are still loyal to SunClan, I will allow you to prove yourself but under strict restrictions, but if you are loyal to AshClan and Thornstar over SunClan and myself; then leave and do not return." Flowerstar clearly didn't want another situation with Thornstar to play out.

Rockfur hesitated then spun on his children. "I can't believe you've done this to me!" He spat. "I have never been so disappointed. Dovetail believed you were all so perfect, but you're all failures!" He faced Yarrowtail. "You've always been small and weak, nothing but a pathetic warrior." His hatred turned to Pebblestep. "And you, you let your own mother die!" Pebblestep winced, she had been keeping

her silence; this whole ordeal had clearly shocked her. "Even you," He spun around to face Cloudspots who had been watching from the sidelines, he wasn't littermates with them but they were still his siblings. "You had a pathetic excuse for a mentor and now you're a pathetic excuse for a warrior." Cloudspots's eyes showed genuine hurt. Finally, Rockfur turned back to Cinderflame. "You were the one kit I had hopes in, you were strong brave and the perfect warrior...but now I see you're nothing but a failure."

"You're the failure!" Cinderflame lashed out, pain and betrayal smoldering in her amber eyes. "You failed SunClan, you failed the warrior code and you failed my mother! She believed in you, she loved you and you threw it all away! I want you to leave! I want you to leave so I never have to see you again! You will never be my father!"

SunClan let out gasps, even Rockfur seemed shocked by her words. Cinderflame shoved past her father to the warriors den, not looking over her shoulder. Yarrowtail and Pebblestep shared a concerned look and quickly joined their sister, Cloudspots followed shortly after; leaving the Clan in a dead silence.

"Well, Rockfur?" Flowerstar demanded. "Will you leave? Or will you stay?"

"This Clan has nothing more for me." Rockfur said under his breath; something had changed after Cinderflame's words. He wasn't angry, he didn't seem to be showing any emotion whatsoever.

"Very well, Snakewhisker and Bramblepelt; please escort Rockfur to the AshClan border. Snakewhisker and Bramblepelt nodded and the three cats left without another word. SunClan was silent, no cats knew what to do about what had just happened.

Chapter 38

Today was the day, Dawnfire felt it the second she woke up from a sharp pain in her belly. She had these pains before; but this time it was different. After two moons of barely being able to walk from her belly full of kits; she would finally be meeting them. Dawnfire was lying on her side, Applespots had left and it was Fawnheart surprisingly who stayed by to take care of her and help calm her down. Squirreltail had gone to tell Pebblestep, and Dawnfire assumed she was gathering herbs. It wasn't long before Pebblestep entered, jaws full of moss and other herbs. She placed them neatly beside Dawnfire's head and turned to grab a stick, setting it by Dawnfire's mouth. "You're gonna want this."

Dawnfire was prepared for the pain, but she hoped it wasn't as bad as she thought. Flashbacks of Dovetail's final birth flashed into her mind, the pain the she-cat was in resulting in her death. Dawnfire dug her claws into the moss and bracken, she couldn't think like that. Everything would be okay. She knew it would.

"I wanna go in there!" Dawnfire heard Lionclaw's plea from outside, Pebblestep let out a heavy sigh.

"Fine, Lionclaw. But do not cause a scene." Pebblestep said, placing a paw on Dawnfire's belly. "Not time yet, but here soon. Just stay focused Dawnfire."

Dawnfire nodded and Lionclaw slipped into the medicine den; his wound was getting better but he still wasn't allowed to participate in warrior duties. Lionclaw sat beside Fawnheart, close to Dawnfire's head and started rasping his tongue over her ear. Dawnfire let out a purr, having Lionclaw beside her calmed a lot of her nerves.

Dawnfire waited and waited, Fawnheart left a few times to see to her kits and Pebblestep would head back to her den every so often, even though it started at dawn; Dawnfire still hadn't started actually giving birth and it was already sunhigh. Dawnfire twitched her tail

impatiently and anxiously, but Lionclaw never left her side. She even got checked up on by Turtleblaze, Yarrowtail, Cloudspots, Cinderflame, and Flowerstar a few times. They were all eager to meet the new kits, Cinderflame and her siblings were still under a bit of shock from their father's choice to leave; but they were coping well. Dawnfire could feel the sun was high in the sky, and her kits had yet to come.

She was starting to worry that they would never come; that this wasn't actually happening and it was all a dream but every time she felt a jolt of pain she was reminded it was very, very real. Before the day was over; Lionclaw and Dawnfire were going to be parents. Now she was starting to panic on if she would be a good mother to her young kits, Dawnfire had shredded the moss and bracken nests she had been lying in, Lionclaw could clearly tell she was distressed and kept trying to calm her down. How could he be so relaxed right now? Wasn't he worried about being a father? Dawnfire shook her head; of course not. Lionclaw wasn't scared of anything.

Dawnfire took the time waiting to think, her life had been full of events and surprises. She thought about Willowkit's death, then the vision she was given of Willowkit would've become leader. The loss of her first mentor, the death of Tigertail, the death of Dovetail, being trained by a murderer, the death of her parents and Poppyfur, falling in love with Lionclaw and becoming deputy. There had been so much death in Dawnfire's life, she was so incredibly grateful to welcome new life into it. A bundle of kits she would love and protect until the day she died, no matter what.

The time truly had come, just as the sun was starting to fall Pebblestep announced that the kits would be here any second. Dawnfire had the stick clamped in her jaws, trying to brace herself for the pain. Lionclaw was close by, his warmth and soothing words kept her calm. He was surprisingly calm in this situation. The first wave of pain hit Dawnfire like a pile of rocks, her teeth dug into the stick and she heard it splinter. Lionclaw tense fiercely beside her, maybe he wasn't as calm as she thought. The pain was extremely intense; and it seemed to last forever. She heard something hit the moss, and Pebblestep began to speak.

"Lionclaw, take that kit and lick it; get it's blood flowing." She

commanded. There was a kit? Just like that? Dawnfire craned her neck to see but was interrupted by another jolt of pain, this one just as intense but it didn't seem to last as long. The sound came again, this time it was Fawnheart who moved to the kit. Dawnfire felt a paw run across her belly, she couldn't tell who it was or what even was happening. Two kits had been born and Dawnfire's head was spinning.

"I think that's it, Dawnfire." Pebblestep said with a joyful purr to her mew. "You have two beautiful kits." Dawnfire heard a kit up by her head start mewling loudly, the other one started letting out tiny squeaks. "Good work you two, put them with their mother." Suddenly, there were two warm tiny kits at her stomach; instantly going to nurse. Dawnfire looked down at them, and they took her breath away. One was a bit bigger, and was a golden brown tabby like Dawnfire just without the white. The other was golden like her father, but had white splotches. She couldn't take her eyes off of them; they were absolutely perfect.

"They're amazing." Lionclaw mewed softly in her ear, all Dawnfire could do was nod. She had two kits, two perfect, beautiful kits.

"Before you get too caught up in them," Pebblestep spoke, drawing Dawnfire's attention away. "Take these." She pushed some leaves towards Dawnfire. "It's borage and it will help your milk come." Dawnfire nodded and ate the leaves without hesitation, only the best for her kits. Dawnfire put her gaze back onto her kits, the golden brown tom wrestled against his sister for milk, but both got plenty.

"Any idea what you want to name them?" Fawnheart questioned, her eyes were as soft as down and filled with joy. Dawnfire looked at the two of them, but drew a complete blank.

"I don't know yet..." She said quietly, she hadn't given names any thought she wanted to wait to see what they looked like.

"Well take your time," Pebblestep purred, gathering up the rest of her herbs. "You'll have them for a long time." She mewed and touched her nose to Dawnfire's forehead. "You did an amazing job, Dawnfire."

"You were the perfect medicine cat." Dawnfire said, meeting her blue gaze. "Poppyfur would be so proud of you, Pebblestep." Pebblestep looked at her paws, but her eyes sparkled, she nodded and began leaving the nursery. "Enjoy your kits Dawnfire, they're absolutely beautiful." With that, she left.

Fawnheart let out a small purr. "I'm gonna go get Turtleblaze, he'll be excited to meet his new niece and nephew." Dawnfire nodded and turned back to her kits, they had finished eating and were now sleeping peacefully at her belly. A surge of love and protection pulsed through Dawnfire's body, these kits were hers, and she loved them so much already.

"So what do you want to name them?" Lionclaw questioned, lying down to get a look at his kits, his amber eyes were like honey.

"I have no idea." Dawnfire let out a small laugh.

"How about I name the tom and you name the she-cat?" Lionclaw suggested, Dawnfire liked that idea and chances are she would love whatever name Lionclaw chose. Turtleblaze came and visiting, falling in love with the kits instantly, just as Dawnfire had done with Mudkit and Earthkit. They came to visit too, but Turtleblaze managed to keep Earthkit quiet.

"It's a tom and a she-cat!" She exclaimed. "Just like us!" She nudged her brother playfully. "Can we play with them?"

Dawnfire let out a purr. "It might be a while before either of them are ready to play, they haven't even been a part of SunClan for a day." Earthkit's tail drooped.

"Mind if I visit?" Dawnfire looked up and saw Flowerstar at the nursery exit. "Pebblestep told me about them and I had to see them for myself." Dawnfire let out a purr and welcomed her leader into the medicine den, Turtleblaze left with his kits to make room.

"They really are fantastic, Dawnfire." She mewed softly, looking over the two kits. "I'm very proud of you." Flowerstar's praise felt as good as if it had come from her own mother, Dawnfire wished her mother and father could be here to see the kits, but she knew they

were watching from StarClan.

"Thank you, Flowerstar." Her voice cracked with emotion and she curled around her sleeping kits, wanting to keep them as close as she could.

"You should get some rest, Dawnfire." Flowerstar touched her muzzle to Dawnfire's forehead, then turned to Lionclaw. "And Pebblestep wants you back so she can change your herbs." For once Lionclaw didn't argue, he rose to his paws and gave Dawnfire an affectionate nuzzle.

"I will be back right as I wake up." He touched his nose to hers. "They're amazing, you did an amazing job. I love you, Dawnfire."

Dawnfire's heart fluttered, she closed her eyes. "I love you too, Lionclaw." Lionclaw gave both Dawnfire and the kits one final loving glance before exiting the den. Flowerstar left shortly after. Dawnfire rested her head in the moss, keeping both eyes on her kits. She watched their small pelts rise and fall slowly as they slept, she barely knew them but she already loved them so much.

Dawnfire fell asleep without realizing it, because she was now in the gathering hollow with the half-moon shining bright in the sky. Dawnfire looked around and soon picked up the sweet scent of Honeywing, joy filled her body it had been so long since she had dreamt about the she-cat. Soon enough, Honeywing stepped into view; her golden pelt shimmering with stars.

"Honeywing!" Dawnfire bounded over to her, greeting her kindly. "I'm so glad to see you!" She exclaimed.

Honeywing purred. "It's good to see you too, Dawnfire. I figured tonight would be as good a time as any to visit you. Your kits are wonderful."

"They are, aren't they." Dawnfire purred proudly, thinking back to her kits who would be sleeping soundly at this moment.

"I can tell you that everyone you've lost and loved are so proud of you." Honeywing told her, Dawnfire's excitement fell a little.

"Even Poppyfur?" She knew the medicine cat thought mates as deputy were a bad idea, what would she even think of kits?

"Even Poppyfur, she thinks you're an idiot for having kits but she trusts that no matter what, you will do the right thing and that your kits will grow up to be amazing warriors." Honeywing explained.

Dawnfire nodded, she wished she could talk to Poppyfur; but she was just as excited to speak with Honeywing, she could barely the last time she did. "Well, you should return to your kits." Honeywing dipped your head. "I know they're in good paws."

Dawnfire felt a purr rise in her chest, and before she knew it she was back in the nursery with dawn breaking through the entrance. Her two kits were still asleep, the she-cat's ears twitched in her slumber. Dreaming so young? Dawnfire looked her over, she needed a name...then suddenly it hit her. The perfect name for her daughter. She waited eagerly for Lionclaw to come visit so she could tell him the name had she chosen. Lionclaw arrived just before sunhigh, his pelt smelling of fresh herbs. "Good morning beautiful." He purred and moved to his kits, they were still sleeping peacefully. Pebblestep told her it was perfectly fine for them to be sleeping so much.

"I came up with a name for the she-kit." Dawnfire said, looking at her daughter. "How do you feel about Honeykit? After Honeywing." Honeywing had done so much for Dawnfire, she wanted to honor the medicine cat in her daughter. Lionclaw's eyes turned soft.

"It's an absolutely perfect name." He purred. "And I have a name for the male." He said, Dawnfire eagerly awaited his answer. "I was thinking Falconkit."

"Falconkit? After Falconclaw..?" Falconclaw was Thornstar's uncle, the one who trained him to be the way he was, he tried to murder Flowerstar.

"Yes and no. That name has been talked about so terribly in SunClan, and I want to replace it. I want our son to carry on the new name, and be better than Falconclaw." Dawnfire looked down at her son, he was golden brown. *Falconkit*... the name seemed to fit

so perfectly.

"I love it, Lionclaw. Falconkit it is." Lionclaw nuzzled her and they looked at the newly named Honeykit and Falconkit. Dawnfire and Lionclaw were parents, and they had the absolute perfect kits, Dawnfire knew that nothing would ever go wrong.

Chapter 39

"I'm gonna win!" Falconkit declared, pouncing on the moss ball, batting it away from Honeykit, she stumbled after it.

"No fair Falconkit! You have bigger paws!" She complained, skidding to a halt, her green eyes annoyed.

"No my fault I grew faster than you!" Falconkit chuckled and bat the moss ball back to his sister so she could hit it. Dawnfire watched her two kits play, Falconkit was bigger and played a bit rougher but would always slow down so his sister could catch up. Honeykit was smaller, and gentler when it came to playing. She was a very kind hearted kit already, Dawnfire loved watching them play.

She didn't allow Falconkit and Honeykit to play with Earthkit and Mudkit just yet; they were barely a half-moon old and Earthkit played rough. She would let them play just outside the nursery, and she checked at all times to make sure they were in view. She kept thinking about the yew bush behind the warrior's den, the one that had killed Willowkit, Dawnfire refused to let her kits go anywhere near it.

Lionclaw would visit all the time since he still wasn't doing warrior duties to play with his kits, and they loved it when their father visited. Dawnfire had gone back to organizing hunting patrols and border patrols, but remaining with her kits in the nursery. She had grown use to the playful chirps and mews of kits, more times than not it was Earthkit who woke her and her kits up. She was certainly rambunctious, but Squirreltail had moved out now that Rosepaw was an apprentice, her mentor being Sandfoot. That had only happened a few days ago, and in a little over a moon Earthkit and Mudkit would be joining her, then it would just be Honeykit and Falconkit in the nursery for the next five moons.

Dawnfire was glad SunClan finally had some apprentices again, but the warriors had been very good about doing the duties around the Clan, and now they had Rosepaw. Dawnfire did not attend the past

two gatherings, but knew that Thornstar announced the apprenticeship of Thrushpaw, Cherrypaw and Briarpaw but at the time he announcde it, they only would've been five moons. Dawnfire grew uncomfortable at the thought that he was making apprentices before they were six moons. She knew he had done time same thing with Puddlepaw, Ravenpaw and Skypaw. She worried for the sake of the SunClan cats in there, she also wondered what happen when Rockfur joined them. Did the AshClan cats accept him? She supposed it didn't matter, what Thornstar said they had to follow.

"AshClan! AshClan cats in our territory!" Dawnfire was suddenly on her paws and standing over her kits, she looked outside and saw Heatherflight in the middle of camp, eyes wide with fear. Dawnfire told Fawnheart to watch her kits and being deputy, she ran to the terrified warrior. "How many? Did you see Echoheart or Thornstar?"

"No need to fret." Another voice spoke. "They come in peace." Rainears stepped into the camp with a group of cats behind her. Dawnfire saw Silvermoon, Riverstorm, Lilyclaw and Haresong, all looked scared and incredibly thin.

"Silvermoon?" Dawnfire padded over to her friends, she looked at Riverstorm; she hadn't seen the former deputy since they talked on the border.

"Riverstorm," Flowerstar said, padding from her den. "Why are you and your warriors here?" She was clearly suspicious, Flowerstar had zero trust in Thornstar.

"I apologize Flowerstar, but we didn't know where else to go." Riverstorm said, dropping her head low. Her fur was dull, and her eyes filled with pain, Flowerstar looked at Dawnfire for a moment, her expressing reading concern and confusion.

"What are you talking about?" Flowerstar questioned, her voice very soft. She clearly sensed that this cats were in some kind of trouble.

"Thornstar!" Silvermoon exclaimed. "He's ruining AshClan!" Dawnfire's fur rose on her spine and she tensed up. Thornstar?

"She's right," Riverstorm added. "He's been lying at every single gathering. Lionstar wasn't killed by a passing rouge; Thornstar and Echoheart planned his death. Echoheart knew he was weak and on his last life, then when SunClan exiled him he came here and killed our leader." Dawnfire's stared at the she-cat, she had a feeling that Thornstar would've done something like that, but even hearing it now. "Echoheart and I's sister, Moonwhisker, the medicine cat, saw it happen and told me about it. She was terrified, and Echoheart overheard us talking. She killed Moonwhisker too." Riverstorm's head dropped, her eyes filled with darkness.

"Who's the medicine cat now?" Dawnfire heard Pebblestep ask from behind her, concern lining her voice. Pebblestep was probably close with the kind AshClan medicine cat.

"We don't have one." Haresong said sadly. "Thornstar told us that if we die from wounds in battle then we don't deserve to be called warriors."

"That's insane!" Dawnfire exclaimed, she honestly couldn't believe her ears. How could any cat think that they didn't need a medicine cat!

"What if your cats fall ill?" Pebblestep questioned, stepping closer to the cats.

"Same thing," Haresong mewed sadly. "If we're not strong enough to fight off disease then we deserve to die." Dawnfire looked at the four cats, they were clearly terrified.

"What else has he done?" Flowerstar questioned, keeping her voice calm but Dawnfire could see a fire burning inside of her.

"My kits..." Lilyclaw spoke up after being quiet for so long. "He made them apprentices at only four moons old. They were too young, Puddlepaw already has a huge scar on his face from training with fully grown warriors."

"The SunClan kits too..." Riverstorm spoke up. "We never wanted those kits, Flowerstar. I argued with Thornstar about it; but he threatened to kill me if I argued with him anymore. They were

made apprentices as soon as they got there."

"My kits?" A sad, quiet voice spoke up. The four AshClan turned to see Applespots standing a few tail lengths away. "How are my kits?"

Riverstorm's eyes softened for a bit. "They're very talented, Applespots. Cherrypaw and Briarpaw are incredibly kind and loving she-cats."

Dawnfire saw a flicker of joy in Applespots's eyes for the first time since she lost her kits. "And Thrushkit...I mean Thrushpaw?"

Riverstorm shared an uneasy glance with Silvermoon. "He's...arrogant. He's taken to his father being leader, and feels higher up than the others."The light instantly faded and she dropped her head.

"So why did you come here, Riverstorm?" Flowerstar questioned with a tilt of her head.

"We knew we couldn't stay in AshClan, it wouldn't be long before Echoheart or Thornstar killed us because we don't like following him. He kills any cat who stands up to him."

"Including Sharptongue..." Haresong mewed sadly. "He said that elders were useless and was going to make him fight, but Sharptongue argued and Thornstar killed him." Dawnfire shook her head with disbelief, how could a cat even do that?

"We knew that of all Clans, SunClan would understand and believe what Thornstar has done to AshClan." Riverstorm continued her explanation, her eyes wide and pleading. "So please, Flowerstar. Let us stay here until we figure out what to do."

Flowerstar looked at her Clan for a moment, most of them had concerned doubts written on their face. "Riverstorm and Dawnfire, please follow me into my den where we can talk about this." She looked to the rest of SunClan. "Please get these cats some prey and treat them with kindness." The first cats to act were Rainears, Goldenleaf and Sandfoot. Dawnfire followed her leader and Riverstorm into the SunTree.

"I'm incredibly sorry for this, Flowerstar but I have to protect my warriors. This is the only thing I can do right now." Riverstorm sat down and lowered her head in shame, Dawnfire felt a pang of sympathy for Riverstorm; she loved her Clan so much and she couldn't do anything to stop Thornstar.

"Lift your head Riverstorm." Flowerstar said sternly, yet kindly. "You and your warriors are welcome in SunClan until AshClan is safe to return to. However, you will probably be sleeping in the apprentice den; we only have one right now and she will welcome you. As for you Dawnfire, please see to it that the AshClan cats are treated kindly and as our own Clanmates. If any cats have an issue they can speak with me directly." Dawnfire stood up and dipped her head, she admired Flowerstar more than ever right now. Welcoming an enemy Clan to live with them; because they were scared and needed help.

Dawnfire exited the den and approached Haresong, Silvermoon and Lilyclaw. They all looked awkward and uncomfortable and were getting some strange looks from the other SunClan warriors. Dawnfire spoke up. "Flowerstar has made it clear that these cats are welcome in SunClan, they need our help and we will treat them just as our own Clanmates. They are seeking shelter from Thornstar, and you should treat them well. That could very well be us hiding from the same threat, if you have issues you may speak with Flowerstar directly." There was a tense silence, but no cats stood up. They were thinking of how if Dawnfire and Lionclaw hadn't fought Thornstar, he would be leading SunClan in the same direction.

Silvermoon approached Dawnfire. "Thank you so much, Dawnfire. This means everything to us." She dipped her head. Dawnfire nuzzled her old friend.

"Of course, Silvermoon. We all understand the threat of Thornstar too well; I'm just sorry that he came to AshClan." Silvermoon shrugged, her eyes still sad. "Do you want to meet my kits?"

Silvermoon's blue eyes widened. "You had kits?" She questioned, shocked. "Are they Lionclaw's?"

Dawnfire purred and nodded, leading Silvermoon to the nursery

where Falconkit wrestled with a ball of moss and Honeykit cheered him on. Honeykit was the first to notice that Silvermoon and Dawnfire had entered, she ran up and greeted them cheerfully, getting a look of confusion after looking at Silvermoon. Falconkit had noticed at this point as well and padded up to them.

"Who're you?" He asked, giving Silvermoon a suspicious look, his tiny tail flicking behind him, his amber eyes sparking.

"This is Silvermoon, she's an AshClan warrior." Dawnfire explained, keeping her voice light.

"An AshClan warrior?" Falconkit wrinkled his nose. "What is she doing here? Don't we hate AshClan, that's what Earthkit said."

"We do not hate AshClan," Dawnfire explained, she noticed Silvermoon dropping her head slightly. "Silvermoon is a friend, and she has three others here."

Honeykit bounded past her brother and looked up at Silvermoon with wide, shining green eyes. "Hi! My name is Honeykit!"

Silvermoon let out a purr. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Honeykit." She dipped her head, as if she was respecting a leader. "She's very kind." Silvermoon said with a gentle mew to Dawnfire.

Falconkit let out a snort. "Well I'm Falconkit, I'm older than Honeykit." He puffed out his fuzzy chest.

"Not by long!" Honeykit squeaked.

"Long enough." Falconkit sneered, Silvermoon let out a *mrrow* of laughter, but suddenly let out a small yelp of pain. She turned around and Dawnfire saw that Earthkit had claimed her tail.

"Got you, AshClan!" Earthkit declared, eyes sparkling with ambition. Dawnfire shook her head.

"Silvermoon is not our enemy, Earthkit." She scolded softly, Earthkit let her tail go and laughed.

"I know that, but she wasn't looking so I attacked!" She dropped into

a playful crouch, Silvermoon purred with amusement.

"Silvermoon, this is my niece Earthkit." Dawnfire motioned to Mudkit who was standing not far behind his sister. "And that's Mudkit, my nephew."

"Nice to meet you." Silvermoon said kindly.

"Why is AshClan even here?" Falconkit piped up, running around to stand next to Earthkit.

"They have some troubles and they need our help." Dawnfire explained simply, not wanting to go into any of it; they were kits they didn't need to know every detail.

Falconkit shrugged and returned to his game of moss ball, batting it to Earthkit a couple times who would throw it back.

Dawnfire heard talking and saw Fawnheart approaching the nursery, wanting to visit her kits. She looked at Silvermoon with a twinge of doubt. "Hello, Silvermoon." She greeted, not showing any hostility but also showing no compassion. "Hope you enjoy our camp." She dipped her head and gathered her two kits. Dawnfire cast a sorry look at Silvermoon who just shrugged it off, Dawnfire left Fawnheart to watch the kits and she took a walk with Silvermoon.

"So, how did you guys get out without Thornstar knowing?" Dawnfire questioned. "And only four of you wanted to leave?"

Silvermoon let out a sigh. "No, others wanted to but most were to scared. Ashblaze and my brother, Stormheart hate Thornstar, but wanted to stay incase things got worse. They had no issues with me or any of the others leaving. Wheatwhisker, Haresong's brother wanted to leave, so did Foxfeather and Featherfall but they were both too scare as well as ashamed. Featherfall would follow Echoheart, but only now is he questioning it."

"If I remember correctly, Lilyclaw used to follow Echoheart." Dawnfire recalled. "She was one of the cats that attacked the SunClan apprentices so long ago." Dawnfire remembered the day

where she and all the other apprentices at the time had been ambushed at Jagged Rocks, Lilyclaw had been one of them. She fought Lilyclaw one other time as well.

"She was, but she felt wrong doing it; she was just scared to stand up to Echoheart. Then she had three kits and she was a whole new cat. She finally felt comfortable and stopped following all of Echoheart's orders. Then Thornstar came along and put her kits in danger, Lilyclaw hated him but now she knew that if she stood up she would die. She heard Riverstorm and I talking about leaving and she wanted it; she wanted her kits to follow but she was scared what would happen if Thornstar caught us and she didn't want them to be put in any danger." Silvermoon's eyes were sad, Dawnfire felt the same sadness in her chest. She remembered how scared Lilyclaw had looked the last time they fought, she was glad that Lilyclaw found some bravery; but sad she had been separated from her kits.

"I'm sorry all of this happening." Dawnfire nuzzled her friend's shoulder. Silvermoon shook her head slowly.

"It's alright, Dawnfire. It's only temporary, I know someone will come along soon and finally put an end to Thornstar and his rein."

Chapter 40

"Earthpaw! Mudpaw! Earthpaw! Mudpaw!" SunClan cheered the name of their two newest apprentices, mentored by Snakewhisker and Redclaw. Earthpaw could barely keep her paws still, she was instantly pestering Snakewhisker on when they should leave and what they would be doing first. Mudpaw was more almost stoic, but there was definite excitement in his eyes. Dawnfire purred, she loved new apprentices and now they had three. It was good the apprentice den was so large because now it house not only the three SunClan apprentices, but the four AshClan cats that had been living in SunClan for the past moon.

SunClan had grown use to having the AshClan warriors, they even made friends with them. Haresong had grown rather close to Heatherflight and Flamepetal, they had been apprentices at the same time. Riverstorm was respected by most all cats but found friendship in the senior warriors, mostly Rainears and Crowfur. Surprisingly, Lilyclaw had become friends Applespots. Both she-cats were separated from their kits, and shared the same pain. Lilyclaw told the story of how Briarpaw and Cherrypaw had become rather close friends with Puddlepaw, Ravenpaw and Skypaw. Applespots loved hearing about her kits, and she had even engaged in some warrior duties. Dawnfire was incredibly happy to see Applespots acting lively again, the entire Clan seemed to be more lively.

Silvermoon seemed to be the only cat struggling, her and Dawnfire remained close friends but Dawnfire knew that there was something else bothering her. She checked on Falconkit and Honeykit, the two of them were napping after playing since dawn, she figured they would be fine and found Silvermoon, she was sitting close to Riverstorm and Rainears who were engaged in a friendly conversation but Silvermoon just sat and listened. Her blue eyes were distant, staring into the forest; in the direction of AshClan territory. She was clearly homesick, Dawnfire felt a pang of sympathy and approached her.

"Hey, wanna go for a walk with me?" Dawnfire questioned Silvermoon, the she-cat looked confused for a moment, looked at her Clanmate then nodded and stood up. Dawnfire cheerfully led the she-cat out of camp. They padded quickly, Dawnfire made sure to avoid the AshClan border as she always did. Dawnfire looked up at the sky, the clouds were dark with the threat of a rainstorm hovering above, but the air itself was dry and hot. They didn't normally get weather like this, Dawnfire shook her head. Leaf-fall always brought odd weather. Silvermoon was also looking around, sniffing the air. "So, are you feeling alright?" Dawnfire decided to be outright with Silvermoon.

Silvermoon looked at Dawnfire with a bit of shock, it took her a few moments for the silver she-cat to respond. It was as if she was questioning it herself, after a few heartbeats she sighed. "I miss home, I miss AshClan and it's nothing against you or your Clan but..."

"It's not your Clan." Dawnfire finished her sentence, she had guessed that Silvermoon was feeling homesick.

Silvermoon nodded. "But AshClan isn't home right now, it's been taken over by Thornstar and I have no idea if the cats I love are doing alright. Ashblaze can play into Thornstar's paws pretty well but my brother...I have no idea how he's holding up an I know Thornstar would have questioned him by now...what if he..." Silvermoon shook her head, she stared at her paws, claws digging into the dry soil. "I had plans before Thornstar showed up, but now I don't know if he will ever leave."

Dawnfire looked at her friend, she knew the threat of Thornstar well, but didn't know what it was like to live under the actual threat of him. He had only been deputy of SunClan, and probably would've done the same things to SunClan that he's done to AshClan. Dawnfire shuddered, thinking of Thornstar making Falconkit and Honeykit apprentices before they were ready, he wouldn't kill them because they were his kin. The motherly protection she had felt so many times crept up on her again, she wouldn't let Thornstar hurt her kits. Dawnfire shook her head, she wanted to focus on helping Silvermoon. "You said you had plans before Thornstar showed up? What kind of plans?" She questioned,

Silvermoon looked up, her blue eyes a little lighter.

"Well, I wanted to have kits." She shuffled her paws, looking bashful. "Ashblaze and I talked about it, and he was all for it until Thornstar showed up. He refused to raise kits with a leader like that." Silvermoon dropped her head. "I see how you are with Honeykit and Falconkit and I want that, more than anything. I want little kits to look after and care for, Ashblaze would be an amazing father and I just..." She broke off, voice choked with emotion. She had been clawing at the dying grass under her paws.

Dawnfire remembered the fear she felt of what Thornstar would've done for her kits, she never expected to have them either but she couldn't imagine a life without Honeykit and Falconkit. Dawnfire took a step forward and nudged Silvermoon. "Don't worry, Silvermoon." She said with a soft purr, "Thornstar won't rule AshClan forever, we will put a stop to him." Silvermoon's eyes were grateful, she gave a tiny nod.

"Hey! Dawnfire!" Dawnfire turned and saw Earthpaw burst through the trees, Snakewhisker following quickly behind her. "What are you doing out here?" She asked, green eyes twinkling with curiosity and tail twitching.

"Just going for a walk with Silvermoon." Dawnfire motioned toward her friend. "What about you? Exploring the borders?"

Earthpaw nodded excitedly. "Yep! We were on our way to the MoonClan border when I saw you."

"Are you behaving for Snakewhisker?" Dawnfire asked, she knew how much of a pain Earthpaw could be, she lived with her in the nursery.

"She is." Snakewhisker spoke up. "She's...lively and excited, but not too much to handle." He looked at his apprentice with amusement, Earthpaw was staring up at the sky. The storm clouds grew closer, and darker. They covered most of the sky at this point, Dawnfire got a small chill.

"Is it gonna rain?" Earthpaw questioned with a twitch of her ears.

"Smells like rain, and the clouds are really dark."

"Probably." Snakewhisker said, narrowing his eyes at the clouds. They had covered the sun, and shaded the forest. Dawnfire heard a low rumble of thunder in the distance, the air still felt dry. "We should probably head back before it kicks up, it looks like it's going to be a bad storm." Snakewhisker said. "Your kits will be wanting you." Dawnfire's mind raced to Honeykit and Falconkit, she wondered if they were still sleeping. Did they hear the thunder?

Dawnfire nodded. "We really should get back, I don't want them to get scared." The other cats agreed, there was a small complaint from Earthpaw who wanted to see the rest of the territory but also didn't want to get caught in a downpour. The thunder grew closer, Dawnfire swore she could feel it shake the ground under her paws. Whenever the rain decided to show up, there would certainly be a lot of it.

Dawnfire took another step before the forest was flooded with light. She let out a cry as the light blinded her eyes and stumbled backwards into another cat. She heard one cat hit the floor and based on the hiss it sounded like Earthpaw. Dawnfire forced her eyes open, she saw colored spots and tried to focus. She saw the cats around her struggling as well.

"What was that?" Earthpaw growled, squinting her eyes.

"It was lightning." Snakewhisker said, shaking his a head a little bit. Dawnfire's nose filled with a rancid scent, when she finally got her eyes to focus she saw smoke rising from past the trees, near SunClan camp.

"You smell that too?" Silvermoon asked, her voice trembling.

"We need to get back to camp, now!" Snakewhisker hissed and broke into a sprint, the other three followed quickly after him. The scent grew stronger, burning Dawnfire's nose. Soon through the trees she saw a bright orange light and heard the cracking of wood. *The forest is on fire!* The fire was spreading fast through the dry forest, it wouldn't be long until it completely took over the SunClan camp. Dawnfire and the others broke through the entrance and

found the camp in a panic, smoke was billowing into the camp and the fire crept closer.

Dawnfire's first though was her kits, she crossed the camp in a few short bounds and found Lionclaw rushing Honeykit and Falconkit out of the nursery; both were unharmed but both were very scared. Lionclaw pushed them along, Honeykit's eyes were wide and she didn't speak whereas Falconkit was asking a million questions. Dawnfire met her made and looked around camp. "Start leading cats to the Gathering Hollow border, get across it and if you need take them to MoonClan. I'm going to start helping others." Dawnfire crouched down to see her kits. "Follow your father okay?" Her heart ached, she wanted to stay with them but she was still the deputy, she had to look after her Clan. "I'll be after you shortly, be brave." She nuzzled her kits, then her mate before he began rushing the kits out.

Pebblestep had already started guiding Hawktalon and Nightwing out of camp, Hawktalon had his teeth in Nightwing's tail and she guided him away from the blaze. The fire grew closer and closer, Dawnfire could feel the heat on her fur and the smoke surrounded her, causing her and others to cough. Squirreltail had ran to help Mudpaw who had gotten separated from his mentor, she quickly guided the apprentice away from the danger, but both failed to see the tree that ignited. Dawnfire watched as a small branch broke from the tree, hitting the ground and spraying burning embers over the two cats.

Squirreltail let out a cry of pain and stumbled backwards from the burning branch, Fawnheart and Brackenpelt rushed over to the two of them; Pebblestep was quick to follow. Dawnfire couldn't see how injured the two were through the thick smoke. Dawnfire ran around the burning camp, feeling embers fall on her fur. She ignored the pain, the camp had cleared quickly. Dawnfire looked in horror as the nursery was completely engulfed in the hungry fire, she felt sick to her stomach; what if her kits had still been in there. Dawnfire shook her head, her kits were being led out of camp as were most other cats.

However, there was one cat that hadn't been accounted for, Flowerstar. Not once since the fire started had Dawnfire seen the

gray leader, where was she? Dawnfire spotted Turtleblaze leading the final group of cats out. He looked at Dawnfire. "Get out of camp!" He shouted, Dawnfire looked around.

"Where's Flowerstar?" She asked, Turtleblaze looked alarmed.

"I haven't seen her, but Dawnfire you can't stay in camp!" Dawnfire looked at the SunTree, the tips of the branches had been burned, as had the lichen covering the entrance.

"I need to check her den!" Dawnfire sprinted over to the SunTree, her lungs burned from the smoke and she started to cough heavily. Dawnfire poked her head inside, it was full of heavy smoke but inside, Flowerstar was huddled into a ball. "Flowerstar!" She cried and rushed inside, helping the SunClan leader to her paws, Flowerstar was still alive but her legs could barely hold her up.

"Dawnfire..." Flowerstar coughed out, but Dawnfire didn't say anything. She let her lean up against her, but she was almost dead weight. Dawnfire pushed through the extra weight and out of the SunTree, Turtleblaze still stood outside waiting.

"Hurry up!" He cried, his voice sounding dry and painful. Dawnfire nudged Flowerstar forward, but the leader's pawsteps were heavy and weak. Dawnfire couldn't carry the entire weight of Flowerstar on her shoulders, her lungs burned and ached, every muscle in her body yelled at her to stop, but Dawnfire continued. She refused to leave Flowerstar here to die!

Turtleblaze realized her struggled and moved forward to help, but with a loud crack her brother vanished in a wave of smoke and embers as a medium sized tree fell; cutting them off. Dawnfire winced away from the smoke, coughing heavily. She could no longer hear Turtleblaze's voice, and her throat burned too much for her to speak. Dawnfire took another step forward, but Flowerstar couldn't walk any longer. The SunClan leader fell to the ground, letting out pained and shaky coughs.

"Flowerstar!" Dawnfire cried, trying to force Flowerstar to her paws. "Come on! We have to leave!" But Flowerstar wouldn't budge.

"Dawnfire, you need to go." She croaked, Flowerstar's eyes were half-open, but the once bright light was fading.

"No!" Dawnfire hissed. "Not without you!" Dawnfire lifted Flowerstar onto her back, but Flowerstar pushed her away.

"Dawnfire," Flowerstar lifted her head, looking Dawnfire into her eyes. Her gaze was steady, and full of fear...as well as hope. "My time is over." She said quietly, Dawnfire's heart twisted into knots.

"No! It's not!" Dawnfire wailed. "You're SunClan's leader! We can't do this without you! I'm not ready to become leader!" Dawnfire through herself on the ground, the fire burning bright around them. Her body shook was sadness, she felt like a kit again. "I'm not ready..." She whimpered.

Flowerstar shifted her body, touching her dry nose to Dawnfire's forehead. "Yes you are, Dawnfire. You will be the savior of the forest, I know you will." Flowerstar closed her eyes, her breathing was rough. "When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun." Dawnfire stared as Flowerstar recited the prophecy. "You've been hiding from your destiny, Dawnfire, but now it's time to realize it. You will blaze brighter than the sun, Dawnfire. Brighter than I ever could." She opened her pale eyes again, they were filled with love; like the love of a mother. The love Dawnfire felt for her two kits. "I was never good at judging cats, I thought that Thornstar would never turned into Falconclaw, and I was worried that you would never face your destiny; but I know now that you are ready. You are ready to lead SunClan, Dawnfire; and you are ready to save the forest."

"Flowerstar..." Dawnfire's voice choked up, she felt a drop of water hit her fur, and again and again. The rain was starting to fall. Dawnfire laid down beside her leader. "Flowerstar, how am I supposed to lead SunClan?"

Flowerstar closed her eyes. "You won't be doing it alone, Dawnfire...we will all be there for you." Dawnfire pressed against Flowerstar, she felt like a kit again. After she had lost Willowkit and curled into her mother, death had scared her and now she was losing someone else she cared so deeply for. She was terrified, back

then when she made the promise to Willowkit, she didn't ever think she would become leader, but now it was as real as the sun. The rain was falling hard, pouring down onto the forest and killing the flames, Dawnfire's fur was no longer hot but heavy and wet, but she refused to leave Flowerstar's side.

She listened to Flowerstar's breaths, holding on to every single one until they got slower and slower, listening to Flowerstar's final breaths calmed her; the heat was dying out and Dawnfire fell asleep beside her leader.

"Dawnfire!"

"Dawnfire! Flowerstar!"

The voices were distant, they almost didn't seem real. Dawnfire opened her heavy eyes, she lifted her head slowly. Flowerstar was still beside her, but her entire body was still and cold and not just from the rain which still poured heavily down. The fire was gone, but the burned remains of SunClan camp were still there, and so was Flowerstar's death.

Dawnfire stood up, her fur was drenched and her body sore. She saw two figures through the pouring rain, one golden and one brown. It was Turtleblaze and Lionclaw, they lept over the tree that had fallen, and once they saw Dawnfire both toms sprinted to her side.

"You're alive!" Lionclaw cried and nuzzled her desperately, his eyes searched her body for any injuries; then their golden gaze shifted past her to the body of Flowerstar. Dawnfire looked at her paws, covered in a mud and soot.

"Flowerstar?" Turtleblaze's voice was quiet, he sounded like a scared apprentice, but it didn't last. He let out a sad sigh then turned to Dawnfire. "Go to Pebblestep, we set up shelter near the Gathering Hollow, a few MoonClan cats saw the fire and came to help. Lionclaw and I can take care of Flowerstar's body."

Dawnfire didn't have the energy to argue, she just dragged her paws through the mud and wet ash which clung to her pelt. Every step

was heavier than the last, the entire forest seemed devoid of color. The fire had sapped all life out from SunClan territory. Dawnfire reached the river and crossed it, she had no thoughts, just sadness filled her chest and suffocating her.

SunClan's makeshift camp included a small collection of rocks. Pebblestep had Squirreltail under a rock to protect her from the rain, her eyes were closed and covered with herbs. Cinderflame was the first to see Dawnfire arrive, the dark gray she-cat rushed over to her. "You're okay!" She said with joy, the rest of SunClan looked up as well. Dawnfire spotted Shadeflower, Violetfur, Jayfur, Mosswind and medicine cat, Ravenheart.

Dawnfire nodded slowly, Ravenheart approached her. "Greetings, Dawnfire. Shadowstar sends his best wishes and we are here to help as much as we can." Dawnfire just nodded as Ravenheart looked over her for injuries.

"Where's Flowerstar?" Violetfur asked, the question hung in the air and she assumed that all cats knew the answer.

"Flowerstar is dead." Dawnfire said, raising her voice. "She died in the fire, she was too weak from the smoke to escape. Turtleblaze and Lionclaw are bringing her body back. The clearing filled with a painful silence, all the cats shared sad looks. Dawnfire trudged forward, she wanted to see her kits. She found them with Applespots and Lilyclaw, they were huddled and trying to hide from the rain.

Falconkit spotted her first and jumped to his paws, he was completely unharmed. "You're back!" He bounded to Dawnfire's side, his fur quickly getting soaked in the pouring rain. Honeykit followed shortly after, also unharmed. Dawnfire held her kits close, grateful that they weren't hurt. She nuzzled her kits lovingly, trying to forget about the fire and the death of SunClan's leader.

"Dawnfire." Dawnfire heard a soft voice behind her, she turned to see Pebblestep. The medicine cat's blue eyes were sullen.

"I'm not ready yet..." Dawnfire turned away, she didn't want to journey to the Moonstone just yet, she didn't want to be leader yet.

"No, I know." Pebblestep said. "Take your time to rest, we will mourn Flowerstar then we will leave." Dawnfire heard her paw steps get farther and farther away.

"What happened to Flowerstar?" Honeykit asked with a tilt of her small head, her blue eyes were curious.

"She joined StarClan." Dawnfire said softly, moving her kits even closer. "She lost her ninth life in the fire."

"Does this mean you're leader now?" Falconkit asked. "You were deputy right? Or since you have kits..."

"I am leader now, Falconkit." Dawnfire had finally said it outloud, she was leader now. She was the new leader of SunClan, even if it wasn't official yet. She didn't have her nine lives yet, but she was still the leader of SunClan.

"Do you have nine lives now?" Falconkit asked, his curiosity clearly running wild. It would be exciting for any kit if their parent became leader.

"Not yet," Dawnfire could help but let out a small purr of amusement at her son. "After we mourn Flowerstar."

And that's what the cats of SunClan did, Lionclaw and Turtleblaze returned with Flowerstar's body and she was set up in the clearing. The four AshClan cats and the cats of MoonClan that had come to help joined in as well. Sitting a silent vigil for their fallen leader, Dawnfire noticed Stormwind close to Cinderflame, Yarrowtail, Pebblestep and Cloudspots. Stormwind was Dovetail's mother and Flowerstar's sister. Dawnfire almost forgot how much kin Flowerstar had in the Clan. Dawnfire was glad they were all close.

During the vigil, Dawnfire took a lot of time thinking about what would happen next. She would go to the Moonstone, receive her nine lives and return as leader of SunClan, it would be her job to lead the Clan and decide their future. To name warriors and apprentices, she hadn't even been deputy that long; was she really ready to become leader?

Chapter 41

"It's time to go." Dawnfire lifted her head, her body was stiff from lying in the rain for so long. Hawktalon and Nightwing had begun carrying Flowerstar's body off; Dawnfire must have drifted off for a few moments. Pebblestep stood above her, eyes sad yet bold. "We can't push this off, Dawnfire."

Dawnfire stood up, stretching her stiff limbs. "I know, Pebblestep." She shook her pelt, the rain had slowed to a small drizzle but the forest still reeked of fire. "Let me tell my kits." Pebblestep nodded and she went over to the small rocky outcrop where Honeykit and Falconkit were laying. She leaned in and touched both of their pelts with her nose. "I'll return shortly." She whispered and turned away, Lionclaw was standing in her way.

"Leaving?" He questioned, his eyes were weary. He probably hadn't slept, Dawnfire's eyes went to the large scar on his chest that twisted down to his stomach.

Dawnfire nodded. "Hopefully I won't be gone long." She leaned and nuzzled in, her fears crawling on her back. "What if I'm not ready to be leader." She whispered into his ear.

Lionclaw nuzzled her back, his breath warm on her fur. "You are, Dawnfire. You will be an incredible leader, I know it." His words gave her confidence, Dawnfire stepped back and nodded before joining up with Pebblestep.

"Let's go." She looked at the medicine cat, Pebblestep nodded and the two cats set off. Dawnfire's entire body ached and she was hungry, but she couldn't eat before the ceremony. Dawnfire and Pebblestep walked close by, and didn't stop until they caught the attention of a MoonClan patrol led by Pigeonpelt.

"SunClan!" He called, Frostfire, Feathercloud and Icepool followed him. "How are you holding up? Shadowstar wanted to ask, if you don't mind me asking. Were any cats hurt"

Dawnfire swallowed her sadness, luckily Pebblestep spoke before her. "We lost Flowerstar unfortunately, and Squirreltail got some burns on her face. She should be okay though."

Pigeonpelt lowered his head. "I'm deeply sorry to hear about Flowerstar." He met Dawnfire's gaze. "I suppose you're on your way to recieve your nine lives?"

Dawnfire nodded. "Yes, I am. We left not to long ago."

"Well, you'll be a wonderful leader, Dawnfire." Pigeonpelt said kindly, the other patrol members nodded. Dawnfire felt warmed at their belief in her.

"Thank you." She dipped her head respectfully.

"Have a good rest of your journey! May StarClan light your path, Dawnfire." Pigeonpelt said his farewell and the patrol vanished into MoonClan territory. Pebblestep nudged Dawnfire forward and they continued. The walk was silent, Dawnfire was mostly absorbed in her own thoughts about being leader. She would have so many new responsibilities now, not to mention; what would Thornstar do? She would be representing SunClan at gatherings, he would be a fellow leader of hers. Would he try anything new, or would he remain how he had been?

They crossed around the Gathering Hollow, soon reaching the border to the Spirit Woods, they crossed into MoonClan territory for only a few moments to cross the thinner river. Normally MoonClan was the quicker way to travel, but they were already on the other side of the river so they took the Gathering Hollow route. The Spirit Woods was as eerie as Dawnfire remembered it, the white trees glowing in the moonlight, turning their pelts silver. The Spirit Tree grew in the distance, Dawnfire's heart began to race. She hadn't been to the Moonstone since she was an apprentice, and she was terrified. Now she wasn't just following her leader, she was the leader. She was going to receive her nine lives, what would happen? What if she didn't get them? What if StarClan rejected her?

Pebblestep could clearly sense Dawnfire's panic because she rested her tail on Dawnfire's flank. "Relax, Dawnfire. Everything will go

smoothly." Dawnfire looked at her, this was the first time Pebblestep would be welcoming a new leader as well. Did Poppyfur teach her? Dawnfire wished Flowerstar would have taught her something about this ceremony. "I promise, just go in, touch your nose to the stone and everything will just happen." Dawnfire nodded, she looked into the twisting roots, every step was hesitant as she made her way into the dark cave.

Inside was cold and silent, the only sounds were Dawnfire's hushed breaths and shaky pawsteps. The tunnel was narrow, she felt her whiskers scrape the side but it soon opened up into the giant cavern she remembered it to be. The Moonstone stood tall in the center, shimmering bright from the moonlight. Dawnfire looked at Pebblestep, her eyes shimmered and she nodded sternly. Dawnfire swallowed her fears and took small steps towards the Moonstone. *This is it.* She laid down looking into the rock that seemed to hold all of Silverpelt. Dawnfire touched her nose to the stone and a freezing cold overtook her body, the last thing Dawnfire saw was the stars before spiraling into darkness.

Dawnfire was on the ground, but she couldn't move or open her eyes. She could feel cold crawling through her body, it felt as if her life was draining away. *What's happening to me? Am I dying?* Dawnfire wanted to panic, but she couldn't. Soon, a gentle warmth filled her body and Dawnfire opened her eyes. She was no longer in the cavern, but in the Gathering Hollow, the half-moon high in the sky. Dawnfire sat up, she was alone. Alarm filled her body, what if they really had rejected her? Dawnfire stood up, turning in circles for any StarClan cats. "Honeywing!" She called the medicine cat's name, hoping for help.

Out of the corner of her eyes, Dawnfire spotted movement in the sky. She looked up and saw the stars swirling in the sky, she watched in awe as the stars reached the ground. Forming the shapes of nine different cats, as they all took physical forms Dawnfire realized it was all cats she lost. Sunstream sat close with Tigertail, Honeywing by their side as well. Blazeheart and Windflight sat side by side, with a small kit at their paws; it was Willowkit! Poppyfur, Dovetail and Flowerstar all sat close by as well.

"Welcome, Dawnfire." Every cat in StarClan seemed to be speaking

to her, the voices of cats lost and roaming StarClan. "Are you ready to recieve your nine lives?" Dawnfire nodded shakily.

"I am." Her voice was scared, but also surprisingly steady.

"Then let us begin." The first cat to leave the group of nine cats was Willowkit. It had been so long since Dawnfire had seen her sister; her heart began to ache. She was so tiny, Willowkit should have lived longer!

"Oh, Willowkit..." Dawnfire whimpered. "I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry I made you eat those deathberries, I--"

Willowkit shook her head, silencing Dawnfire. "Do not apologize, sister. It is in the past, this was my destiny; to give you the first of your nine lives." Dawnfire stared at her sister, she seemed so wise now. "With this live I give you forgiveness, use it to forgive even the gravest of mistakes; including your own." Dawnfire had to lean down to touch her nose to Willowkit's, and when she did pain shot through her body. She felt the old guilt of when Willowkit first died, as well as Poppyfur's death coursing through her body, the guilt and being unable to forgive herself for her mistakes.

Willowkit pulled her nose away and left Dawnfire shaking. "What was that..? That hurt..."

Willowkit nodded. "Not all lives will feel the same, I must go sister." Willowkit turned and bounded back to her parents. The next cat to approach was Sunstream, her golden pelt shimmered just as Honeywing's did. Dawnfire felt like a young apprentice seeing her first mentor again, she held back her excitement.

Sunstream dipped her head kindly as she always did. "Welcome, Dawnfire." Dawnfire began to speak but Sunstream silenced her. "No need for words, young one. I know what you want to say." Dawnfire nodded, just grateful to see Sunstream. "With this life I give you patience, use it to take your time with every action to make sure you make the right one; as well as to give your Clan the time it needs to follow." Sunstream leaned forward and Dawnfire touched her nose, a very similar pain shot through her body. She felt the frustration of waiting for something to happen, the

frustration that cats took when trying to make decisions; until it ebbed into a feeling of satisfaction. Sunstream pulled away and nodded with a gentle gaze before returning to the group of cats.

Tigertail was the next up, Dawnfire forgot how bold the deputy stood. His head and tail high, chest out; he walked with confidence. Dawnfire realized now how much Lionclaw looked like his father. Tigertail didn't waste any time. "With this life I give you courage; use it to protect your Clan even when you are scared of what might happen." Tigertail touched his nose to Dawnfire's, a burning fire filled her body; but it didn't hurt as much as it empowered her. The feeling of fighting, of defending her Clan and the cats she loved so much. She saw flashes of Sunstream, and Lionclaw and Goldenleaf when they were kits, Tigertail's desire to protect his kits and mate. Tigertail stepped back and looked at her with pride in his amber eyes before returning.

Once he got back to his ranks, Dovetail stepped forward. She was beautiful, her silver fur filled with stars. She looked like she did when in her prime, just as graceful. "Dawnfire," Her voice was like down. "I want to thank you, you cared for all my kits and trained Cloudspots into a wonderful warrior, and now you will lead your Clan to a bright future." Dawnfire's heart felt warm at Dovetail's words, sending joy into her veins. "With this life, I give you love. Use it to care for all the cats in your Clan just as much as your kits and mate." Dovetail touched her nose to Dawnfire's and it felt soothing; not painful. She thought of her kits, Lionclaw, Turtleblaze, Earthpaw and Mudpaw, the cats she loved so much. Then she imagined SunClan with the same amount of love. Dovetail stepped back and dipped her head. "You will be a wonderful leader." She turned back and the next cat up was Blazeheart.

Blazeheart walked just as he did as a warrior, golden brown fur blazing in the starlight, when he got to Dawnfire his starry eyes filled with emotion. "I'm so proud of you, Dawnfire." He mewed, his voice shaking with love and admiration. "You've done so well with everything, and I'm so proud of your brother as well." Dawnfire nodded, she wanted to nuzzle her father and tell him everything about what had happened since he died, but she refrained. "With this life, I give you determination. Use it so you never give up, no

matter how hard things may get." Blazeheart touched his nose to Dawnfire's, and it was much more painful than Dovetail's. She felt the pain of hopelessness, of wanting to give up and call it quits. The feelings she had felt many times before now. Eventually the pain ebbed and Blazeheart returned, Windflight was next.

"You've done amazing things, my daughter." She mewed, Dawnfire's heart ached. It had been so long since she heard her mother's soothing voice. "I only wish I could have met yours and yours brother's kits, but I can watch over them." Windflight's eyes were sad, but full of love and joy. "With this life I give you hope, hold on to it with all your might because hope can light even the darkest of your days." They touched noses, the pain of this life was fiery and intense, it left Dawnfire shaking where she stood. "Stay strong, my beautiful daughter." Windflight dipped her head and returned to Blazeheart's and Willowkit's side.

Dawnfire watched as Poppyfur left her position to approach her, Dawnfire stepped forward. All of her old guilt dealing with Poppyfur's death jumped back up. "Poppyfur! I'm so sorry about what I said--"

"Hush, warrior. Remember the life your sister gave you." Dawnfire looked at Willowkit, and fought to find the forgiveness for herself, Dawnfire nodded slowly. "With this life I give you intelligence, use it solve every problem your Clan may face." Poppyfur and Dawnfire touched noses, Dawnfire didn't feel pain; she felt the satisfaction of figuring out a problem and solving it for the better of her Clan.

"Thank you, Poppyfur." Dawnfire said quietly, she missed the old medicine cat. "Goodbye." She had never gotten to say her goodbyes before Poppyfur joined StarClan, her green eyes softened.

"This is not goodbye, Dawnfire. I will be with you always, and I just want you to know; I didn't know how to feel about you having a mate and kits but I believe in you." Dawnfire was a bit shocked, after Poppyfur turned her down and scolded her for having a mate, her praise meant so much to her. Before she could speak, Poppyfur had returned and Honeywing was taking her place.

"Well here you are, Dawnfire." Honeywing purred and dipped her

head. "You chose your path wisely." Dawnfire purred, she was glad Honeywing was one of her nine lives. "With this life I give you compassion, use it to care and think about the feelings of every cat in the forest; not just your Clanmates. Every cat matters." They held green gazes for a few heartbeats before Honeywing touched her nose to Dawnfire's, the pain of trust, of wanting to care for a cat who betrayed her coursed through her veins like freezing water, Dawnfire shivered. Honeywing stepped back and dipped her head kindly before prancing back to the StarClan cats.

Flowerstar was next, her ninth and final life. Dawnfire was amazed at how her former leader looked. Flowerstar's gray pelt shimmered with stars and she looked like the beautiful, powerful leader Dawnfire knew her as. "Dawnfire, I never knew this day would come, but I'm glad it has. You've done an incredible job at being SunClan's deputy and I know you will be an even better leader. Dawnfire looked into Flowerstar's eyes, feeling the pride and respect for her. "I've made many mistakes with my judgement, both with you and Thornstar but I know now that you will be the leader SunClan needs. That's why, with this life I give you judgement: use it to judge every cat you meet fairly and correctly." They touched noses and Dawnfire saw flashes of a younger Thornstar, and the gnawing pain of uncertainty, the wanting to trust someone, but not knowing their true intentions.

Flowerstar took a few steps back, standing before the other eight cats, she held her head high. "I hail you by your new name, Dawnstar. Your old life is no more. You have now received the nine lives of a leader, and StarClan grants you the guardianship of SunClan. Defend it well, care for young and old; honor your ancestors and the traditions of the warrior code; live each life with pride and dignity."

"Dawnstar! Dawnstar! Dawnstar!" The nine StarClan cheered Dawnstar's new name; her new life. Dawnstar felt her nine lives coursing through her body; filling her blood with energy. She was no longer a warrior, but Dawnstar; leader of SunClan. Dawnstar watched as the Gathering Hollow began to fade, all cats but Flowerstar and Poppyfur faded as well.

"Congratulations, Dawnstar." Poppyfur dipped her head. "You are

SunClan's leader, but I'm afraid it will not be easy." Dawnstar tilted her head.

"What do you mean? Is something going to happen?"

"The fire was just a start, there is a much bigger storm on the horizon; and it could very well bring down all four Clans." Flowerstar explained, then looked up. Suddenly they were in SunClan camp and it was completely barren; the clouds were dark and thick above their heads. Something seemed to be jutting out of the ominous clouds.

"What is that?" Dawnstar questioned, narrowing her eyes to get a better look. She realized with alarm that they were thorns sticking out of the clouds. The clouds that completely covered SunClan territory, shrouding it in darkness. The dens were destroyed, prey turned into crowfood and there wasn't a single cat in sky.

"Beware the rain of thorns." Flowerstar spoke in her ear, Dawnstar tried to turn and see her but she couldn't move her paws. "For they could wipe out the sun, moon and forest and leave a trail of blood."

Dawnstar jolted upright, she was back in the moonstone cavern. Pebblestep was looking at her in alarm, she gave her a questioning looked; Dawnstar could sense her question which she replied to with a nod. The two she-cats quickly made their way out of the Spirit Tree and into the woods, the sun was starting to rise. Dawnstar stretched, her body still ached from her nine lives.

"So it's done?" Pebblestep questioned. "You got your nine lives?"

Dawnstar nodded. "Yes, I got all nine lives." *And it was the most shocking experience of my life.* She already missed all the cats she lost, but she knew they would always be with her now.

Pebblestep's gaze lightened. "Then I'm proud to call you Dawnstar." Dawnstar let out a small purr.

"We should go, i want to get back to the Clan." Dawnstar said, she already felt different and everything was different. She wasn't a deputy, she was a leader with nine lives to serve her Clan, and she

would serve her Clan; fighting until she lost her ninth and final life.

Chapter 42

Dawnstar could hear voices in the distance, SunClan was still in their makeshift camp; probably waiting for their new leader to return. The rain still fell, but a light drizzle. Dawnstar's paws walked slowly across the wet, forest grass. Her body ached with weariness and hunger, she hadn't eaten since before the fire and the leader ceremony accompanied with the walk to the Moonstone and back was making her legs start to ache. Dawnstar saw her Clan working around this makeshift area, there was a small pile of wet fresh kill. It was small and the prey was weak, but it was prey. She felt proud of her warriors, and they *were* her warriors now.

The fact that she was leader was still very odd to Dawnstar, she hadn't quite wrapped her mind around it just yet. She had nine lives and a new name; but she didn't feel like leader. Everything was different and yet it all remained the same. Dawnstar and Pebblestep approached the makeshift camp, there was no sign of the MoonClan cats that came to help, they must have returned home.

"Dawnfire!" Dawnstar jumped slightly, she saw Silvermoon bounding up to her with wide eyes filled with excitement. "Oh, uh I guess it's Dawnstar now, right?" Dawnstar hesitated for a moment but nodded. The other SunClan cats had heard Silvermoon and were now turning to look at her. Dawnstar supposed she should make an announcement.

"Cats of SunClan!" She called for the first time, she didn't really have SunTree to make her announcement either. "I suppose you all should know that the ceremony was complete, and I am now the leader."

"Welcome, Dawnstar!" Sandfoot was the first to shout.

"Dawnstar! Dawnstar!" The rest of SunClan cheered, the mood seemed a lot lighter than when she had left. Dawnstar's chest filled with warmth, she felt truly welcomed by SunClan as the new leader.

"Congratulations, Dawnstar." Riverstorm said as the blue-gray she-cat approached. "SunClan is lucky to have you." Dawnstar dipped her head respectfully.

"That means alot coming from you, Riverstorm. You've always been an incredible deputy to AshClan." Dawnstar dipped her head, Riverstorm was many moons older than Dawnstar, and she still respected her. Riverstorm's eyes grew sad at the mention of her Clan, she looked away. "And I promise it won't be long before you can return to your home, I promise you Riverstorm." Riverstorm looked back up, her eyes grateful also showing a twinge of hope.

"I am going to check on Squirreltail." Pebblestep said. "Her eyes were injured when that tree fell, for now you need to focus on naming a deputy before moonhigh." The medicine cat swiftly padded away to a small makeshift den where Dawnstar could see Squirreltail sleeping, Mudpaw was resting next to her. Dawnstar suddenly remembered that she had to name a deputy, who would she name? Which cat was right for the job?

"Welcome home, Dawnstar." Dawnstar heard a soft mew that instantly calmed her, it was Lionclaw. He was completely unharmed from the fire and his eyes were as bright as ever. "How was the ceremony?"

"It was unlike anything else." Dawnstar said, she wished she could tell Lionclaw about Sunstream and Tigertail; but Pebblestep told her not to share what she had seen while in StarClan. "Come with me, I want to see our kits." Dawnstar really did want to see Honeykit and Falconkit, she hoped they would be awake. The area that they had been sleeping in was being guarded by Lilyclaw and Applespots, the two queens were talking quietly with each other. Honeykit and Falonckit were batting a small pebble back and forth. Lilyclaw looked up when Dawnstar and Lionclaw approached.

"You're back!" The AshClan she-cat exclaimed, getting Honeykit's attention. Falonckit batted the rock one last time, it bounced off a larger rock in the ground with a small clack sound. The two kits were on alert and bounded past Applespots and Lilyclaw.

"Are you a leader now?" Falconkit bounced around his parents, he

could barely contain his excitement. Honeykit was only slightly more composed.

"And is your name Dawnstar? It would be now right? Since you're leader?" Honeykit piled on the questions, it must be exciting for a kit's parent to become leader.

Dawnstar nodded. "Yes I'm leader, and yes my name is Dawnstar now."

"That's weird." Falconkit sat down, his hindquarters making a small splash in the wet grass.

"Be nice." Lionclaw said, but with a chuckle. "Your name will change at least two more times. It's how it works."

"What will my warrior name be?" Falconkit's eyes grew bright and he was back on his paws.

"I suppose that's up to your mother now, the leader chooses the name." Lionclaw looked at Dawnstar, another thing she had forgotten about. She would be naming warriors now, including her own kits. Falconkit looked at her expectantly, like he wanted her to pick one now.

"Your warrior name will depend on what you do while you're an apprentice, the warrior qualities you show." Dawnstar explained, Falconkit seemed a bit disappointed, but still held some excitement. Dawnstar had to get back to deciding on a deputy, she turned to her mate. "Can I talk to you about something?" Lionclaw nodded and then she turned to the two queens. "Would be willing to watch them for just a little bit longer.

"Of course not." Applespots dipped her head. "Your kits an absolute joys to be around. Honeykit reminds me of Briarpaw."

"And Falconkit reminds me of my Puddlepaw." Lilyclaw's eyes were soft. "They're the sweetest little kits." Dawnstar let out a happy purr and turned away with Lionclaw, when they were far enough away they began to talk.

"What did you need?" Lionclaw asked, his eyes gentle and ready to

listen.

"I need to decide on a new deputy," Dawnstar began explaining, Lionclaw nodded his head slowly. "And I was wondering if you wanted to be it?" She expected Lionclaw to be excited, to jump at the option to lead with his mate; but his expression was very different. They weren't happy or excited, but not angry or sad.

"I can't be deputy." He said, voice low. Dawnstar's heart dropped.

"Why not? You would be an amazing deputy, I know you would." Dawnstar pleaded, she was so sure he would take it.

"Because, I don't want to be deputy. As a young apprentice I did, but now I don't. I have no interest in leading SunClan or being deputy; I've told you this before." Dawnstar dropped her head, she knew he didn't want to but she hoped that it would be different now that she was leader. "I'm sorry, Dawnstar. I will always be right at your side, fighting for SunClan and for you; just not as deputy. It's not my place." Dawnstar looked up into his eyes, then to the scar on his chest. He still wasn't allowed to do heavy warrior duties, and SunClan had been out of an active deputy long enough.

"Very well, Lionclaw." Dawnstar raised her head. "Now I just need to figure out who I should pick."

Lionclaw looked around. "I'd ask Snakewhisker, I don't think he'd want to go back to being deputy but he might know how to pick one."

Dawnstar nodded, Snakewhisker had stepped down from deputy because he didn't feel right and didn't want to be leader, but he would have some insight on how to pick a good deputy. "Thank you, Lionclaw." She touched her nose to her mate's and began searching for Snakewhisker. She found the gray tom as he was returning from a small hunting patrol, he dipped his head respectfully.

"Welcome back. Glad to hear that you had a good trip, and even more glad to welcome you as leader." Snakewhisker mewed kindly, his tone sincere.

"Thank you, Snakewhisker." Dawnstar dipped her head in return. "I was wondering if you could help me with something." Snakewhisker flicked his ears and nodded. "I need help deciding on a new deputy, I don't know who to pick. I asked Lionclaw but he turned me down."

Snakewhisker looked around, looking at each of the SunClan warriors. "Well, deciding on a deputy can be difficult, but it doesn't have to be a friend. Pick a warrior who you believe would be best for serving the Clan, staying on top of patrols and keeping SunClan in check. You also have to imagine if that cat will be a good leader, I know you're a brand new leader with nine lives but this deputy could remain your deputy for as long as you are leader. So make sure they would be ready to lead their Clan if need be, or if you fall ill and need to represent SunClan. The warrior has to be brave, and ready to defend their Clan but also not quick to jump into a battle." Dawnstar listened to every word, Snakewhisker was saying. There was a few cats she thought of, but one really stuck with her.

"Thank you very much, Sankewhisker. I think I know who i want to be deputy." Dawnstar dipped her head.

"It's my pleasure," Snakewhisker nodded. "If you need anything else let me know." Snakewhisker bounded off to join Stormwind by the river.

Before Dawnstar named the new deputy, she wanted SunClan back in their own camp. She wanted to see how bad the damage was and what repairs needed to be made, first she wanted to see if Squirreltail could travel. Dawnstar hurried over to Pebblestep who was applying herbs to Mudpaw's ears. The tips were charred and torn, his ears must have gotten rained on by the embers, Dawnstar looked at Squirreltail, she was hiding her face but Pebblestep told her it was her eyes that got hurt.

"Pebblestep." Dawnstar mewed, the medicine cat looked over her shoulder for just a moment, then returned to her patient.

"Yes, Dawnstar?"

"Would these two be okay to travel back to camp? I want to get

started right away on settling back in. We can't live by the river for long." Dawnstar explained.

Pebblestep gave Mudpaw's ears a sniff then turned to Squirreltail. "She's going to need a guide but yes they can go back to camp. I think that would be best, if all my herbs didn't get destroyed." Dawnstar dipped her head.

"Thank you, Pebblestep. I'm going to gather the Clan so we can go home." Dawnstar left the medicine cat and padded to the center of the clearing where she raised her voice. "Attention, cats of SunClan!" Her warriors all turned to looked at her, she still wasn't used to that. "We are going to be heading back to camp so we can work on repairs and getting everything back in order. When we get back to camp I will announce the new deputy as well, but I want to get everyone back to camp first." The SunClan cats nodded and began gathering together, Dawnstar turned and headed back to her kits.

"We're going back to camp?" Applespots asked with a flick of her ears. "Is that a good idea?"

"I think so, we can't stay here forever. We need a camp and dens," Dawnstar moved over to Honeykit. "And I want my kits back in camp where they're safe."

Dawnstar thought she heard Applespots mutter something under her breath, but ignored it. Lionclaw padded up with a gentle look in his eyes. "Are we carrying our kits over the river?" He questioned, looking down at Falconkit.

Dawnstar nodded and grasped Honeykit in her teeth gently, she didn't fight. Falconkit, however, backed away from his father. "I can cross myself!" He protested. Lionclaw chuckled and picked him up anyway, Falconkit thrashed and fought for a few heartbeats then gave up, letting out a small growl of annoyance. Lionclaw and Dawnstar walked side by side to the river where cats were starting to cross.

Squirreltail had Brackenpelt's tail in her teeth, Dawnstar saw that her eyes were closed shut and sticky with herbs. They had the same

burn scars around them that Mudpaw had on his ears. Dawnstar crossed carefully, making sure not to drop Honeykit. As they stepped into SunClan territory, the scent of burning wafted into Dawnstar's nose. The forest had stopped burning, but the smell remained. They crossed through the forest, the edge of the territory was untouched but as they grew closer the damage was more prominent. Fallen, burnt trees blocked their path causing the SunClan cats to jump over them. The grass was charred and dead, many trees were bare of any leaves. The SunClan camp barrier remained mostly intact, but then they stepped inside.

The nursery was the worst, no longer a den but a pile of ash and broken brambles. The warriors den was half-destroyed, but fixable. The medicine den only had a few charred marks, and the SunTree stood strong in the center of camp; the only thing that had changed was the bushes covering the front were burned away. Dawnstar let out a small sigh, it would take some work and they needed to find a nursery. Dawnstar set Honeykit down to address her Clan. "Alright." Dawnstar called out. "Bramblepelt, Rustpelt and Redclaw I want you to go check out the apprentice and the moss hollow, and see what damage is done. Turtleblaze, Cinderflame, Snowtail and Icepteal I want you to start repairs on the warriors den. Yarrowtail, Rainears, Crowfur, Fawnheart and Goldenleaf I want you all to go hunting; we need as much prey as possible. Finally, Redclaw, Willownose, Snakewhisker and Earthpaw, I want you all to go check the AshClan border to make sure they didn't cross while we were out. Everyone else I want in camp working to help on repairs." The cats she had named instantly set out to their assigned duties.

Lionclaw set Falconkit down and looked at her, his eyes burning with pride. "You took charge very well. You're already shaping up to be a great leader." Lionclaw nuzzled her, she nuzzled back gratefully.

"Thank you, Lionclaw. I'm really trying to do my best here. We need to figure out a nursery..." She looked at her two kits.

"Well, you do have a den to yourself now." Lionclaw suggested. "Until we get a new nursery they can just sleep in the leader's den with you."

"Really? We get to sleep in the leader's den?" Falconkit's eyes sparkled with excitement, he nudged Honeykit who looked just as excited about the news.

"I suppose." Dawnstar purred, she loved seeing her kits so excited. They gave her hope even in their destroyed camp. "Why don't you go play in there now while the Clan works." They didn't need to be told twice before they were bounding over to the SunTree. Dawnstar stretched slightly. "Now, I want to talk to the cat I've chosen to be deputy."

"Who did you pick?" Lionclaw asked curiously, Dawnstar explained what Snakewhisker had told her and the cat she had chosen, he approved. Dawnstar looked around the camp and found her clearing dead branches out of camp with Flamepetal.

"Sandfoot!" Dawnstar called her name, the tortishell she-cat lifted her head. Sandfoot had always been a brave, loyal warrior but she was smart and thought about her actions. "I want to talk to you about something."

Sandfoot looked at Flamepetal and nodded, she shoved another pile of branches out of camp and rushed to her leader. "Yes, Dawnstar?"

"I need to decide on a deputy..." She began, really worried that Sandfoot would turn her down. "And after talking to Sankewhisker, I decided that I want you to be deputy."

Sandfoot's green eyes went wide and her jaw dropped. "Me? Of all cats?" She looked down at her paws, her eyes trying to understand. "I had never really considered being deputy." Dawnstars heart dropped, Sandfoot was going to turn her down too. "But, I'd be honored to serve SunClan." Dawnstar's head instantly lifted.

"I'm so glad you agreed. I'm going to make the announcement when the patrols return." Sandfoot returned to her duties, telling Flamepetal that she was going to be deputy. She looked extremely excited, Dawnstar felt confident in her choice. Bramblepelt returned and explained that the apprentice den and moss hollow were mostly untouched, just some charred spots and the hunting patrol returned at dusk with a decent amount of prey. Dawnstar was impressed,

especially with the fire. Finally, the border patrol returned with no news of AshClan crossing the border. Dawnstar thanked her warriors, then jumped onto the SunTree. It was time.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" She had heard Flowerstar call those words so many times, now it was Dawnstar's turn to hold meetings and ceremonies. She looked down over her Clan, sitting high in the tree. All the cats in the SunClan looked up at her expectantly, but she didn't feel uncomfortable. Dawnstar felt like this was her place, like she belonged on the SunTree. "As a new leader it is my job to announce the new deputy of SunClan, and I have decided on a cat who i know will serve SunClan well." Dawnstar looked at Sandfoot, and recalled the words of the deputy ceremony in her head. "I say these words before the spirits of StarClan so they may hear and approve my choice, Sandfoot will be the new deputy of SunClan!"

"Sandfoot! Sandfoot! Sandfoot!" The cats of SunClan cheered their new deputy with pride, all of SunClan respected Sandfoot, and Dawnstar knew they would welcome her as deputy. Applespots hurried to her sister's side and congratulated her, Riverstorm came to her side as well. Dawnstar felt warmth and pride bubbling in her chest, she jumped down from the tree and landed gracefully.

"You looked amazing up there." Lionclaw purred, brushing his pelt against hers. "You truly are a leader now."

Dawnstar touched her tail to his golden pelt. "I feel like a leader." And she did, she could feel the lives of her Clanmates running through her heart, the way they looked at her now. They respected her, and she respected them. Dawnstar truly felt like the leader of SunClan.

Chapter 43

Dawnstar left her den carefully, making sure not to wake her sleeping kits. Falconkit and Honeykit were lying on top of each other, sleeping peacefully. They enjoyed sleeping in the leader's den, it took Dawnstar a bit getting used to sleeping in such a big den by herself; but she was grateful she had her kits. Two of the three nights she had slept in there, Lionclaw had joined her. She enjoyed having him in there with him. In the three days that SunClan had been back in their own camp the warriors den was mostly repaired, while it was being fixed the youngest warriors had moved to the apprentice den which had been rather crowded with the AshClan cats, four warriors and three apprentices. The new nursery was coming along as well, Snakewhisker had organized a team of cats to help rebuild it, Dawnstar hoped it would be finished soon. No she-cats were expecting kits at the moment; but anything could happen.

Dawnstar looked around the camp, it was very unkempt with brambles, branches and leaves across the ground; but Dawnstar knew it would return to normal soon. Dawnstar stepped over a pile of branches to make her way to Pebblestep's den. The medicine cat had been working hard with Squirreltail, Mudpaw was completely fine just with scarred ears but Pebblestep wasn't sure if she would be able to restore Squirreltail's sight.

The medicine den smelled strongly of herbs as Dawnstar stepped it, one of the few dens that was completely untouched by the fire. Squirreltail was stretched out on the floor, eyes still stuck shut with herbs. "Hello, Dawnstar." The she-cat yawned, she lifted her head.

"How are you feeling?" Dawnstar asked, she was very concerned with Squirreltail's fate. She wouldn't be able to be a warrior if she couldn't see, right? Dawnstar hid her concerns and kept calm.

"I feel fine, my eyes don't hurt but they still aren't healed. I opened them yesterday but everything was a blur." Squirreltail explained, resting her chin on her paws. She was clearly upset, but Dawnstar

admired the fact that she was remaining calm about the whole situation.

"Her vision hasn't gotten any better since the fire." Pebblestep said, setting down a mouthful of herbs. "I'm doing everything I can but..."

"It's okay, Pebblestep." Squirreltail said. "I know you're trying your best. I'm just glad it was my eyes and not Mudpaw's."

Dawnstar's heart ached, Squirreltail was a very respectable cat. Dawnstar hadn't trained with her for very long but even as an apprentice she was kind. "Don't you worry, Squirreltail." Dawnstar touched the ginger she-cat's forehead with her muzzle. "No matter what happens you will have a place in SunClan."

"Thank you, Dawnstar." Squirreltail purred. "That means the world to me."

Dawnstar nodded. "Well, I will leave you to get some rest, Squirreltail."

"I won't get much rest." Squirreltail laughed. "Between my parents, Brackenpelt, Rosepaw and my brother I've had constant visitors." Dawnstar purred, glad that Squirreltail had so many cats to care for her. Dawnstar bid farewell to Squirreltail and Pebblestep and stepped back into the camp. She saw Applespots sitting outside the warrior's den, Falconkit and Honeykit had apparently woken up and were now playing with a pebble. There was a deep sadness in Applespot's eyes, Lilyclaw approached her but her eyes remained dark. Dawnstar let out a sad sigh, she still hadn't gotten over the loss of her kits. Dawnstar looked at her own kits, and she understood. Dawnstar's whole life would be torn apart if she lost Honeykit and Falconkit, she couldn't see her life without them.

Applespots had been helping around camp, but she never seemed to be happy anymore, Dawnstar wished she could help the poor queen. An idea sparked in Dawnstar's mind, she could help. Suddenly eager, Dawnstar looked around for any cats that could help. She considered Lionclaw and Turtleblaze, but Turtleblaze wouldn't approve and Lionclaw was still restricted. Dawnstar's eyes then rested on Cinderflame and Yarrowtail who were weaving

branches in the new nursery. She hurried up to them, both turned to face her.

"Need something, Dawnstar?" Cinderflame stood up and shook a thorn from her paw.

"Yes, I do. Come with me." Dawnstar led the two of them just out of camp where no one would hear them.

"What's this about?" Yarrowtail questioned with a flick of his tail.

"I want to get Applespot's kits back." Dawnstar blurted out her plan, the only way Applespots would be happy is if she got her kits back.

Cinderflame and Yarrowtail shared an uncertain look. "How exactly?" Yarrowtail questioned, his pale eyes showing doubt. "It didn't exactly work out for Flowerstar the last time."

"We're getting them back the same way we lost them, we're going into AshClan territory and taking them."

Cinderflame looked at her paws, then back up. "Look, Dawnstar. It's sounds like a great plan, but I don't know how well it would work." Dawnstar's spirit fell slightly. "They aren't kits anymore, they may not want to leave. They've been living in AshClan for quite a while now, they might want to stay with their father."

Dawnstar looked down, Cinderflame was right. They were a lot older now; they left when they were about four moons old and had been there ever since. Dawnstar dug her claws into the soil and looked back up; locking with Cinderflame's amber gaze. "If they don't want to come then we won't force them to; but I have to at least try."

Cinderflame and Yarrowtail exchanged another glance and held it for a long time, the two siblings seemed to be talking to each other without even speaking. After a few heartbeats they both gave a slight nod. "Alright, Dawnstar." Cinderflame said. "We will join you, but what time should we do this at?"

Dawnstar thought for a moment. "Night would be the best, meet me outside camp tonight." The two agreed and Dawnstar left them be.

Her heart was racing with excitement, she would be getting her revenge on Thornstar in a very easy way; and she would be bringing three kits home.

Dawnstar, Yarrowtail and Cinderflame stood before the AshClan border, the moon was high in the sky and Dawnstar was prepared. She had left Honeykit and Falconkit back in the SunTree with Lionclaw, they were safe. Now, it was time to get another set of kits.

"Here we go." Dawnstar said confidently and stepped over the border, the scent of AshClan wafted around them. They moved as quietly as they could through AshClan, the last time Dawnstar had been here was when the kits were originally stolen, she was only deputy then. AshClan's territory smelled strongly of pine, and Dawnstar kept feeling pine needles poke into pads. How could AshClan live like this? She shook her head and continued. Dawnstar tried to remember the way to AshClan camp, but didn't want to go directly to the entrance. She had to find the apprentice den, then she had to wake them.

The three SunClan cats snuck through AshClan territory, keeping their pelts low to the ground and their pawsteps silent. In the distance Dawnstar saw incredibly tall trees rising up, that was where the camp was. She signaled her two warriors to follow her and they began heading towards the camp, Dawnstar's blood was pounding in her ears, louder and louder the closer she got to AshClan's camp. The smell of AshClan grew stronger and she could hear voices.

Dawnstar stopped and signaled Yarrowtail and Cinderflame to stop as well. She hadn't heard the voices before, but they sounded familiar. Dawnstar crept closer and saw three shapes in the moonlight. "You heard what he said! We need to train at night too." A tom spoke, his mew was annoyed.

"But our mentors aren't here. We could get in trouble." The next voice was skittish, and was a she-cat.

"We won't get in trouble, we're Thornstar's kits for StarClan's sake!" The tom spat again. Dawnstar's heart lifted. It was the three kits!

Dawnstar inched closer and the three cats came into view. Thrushpaw was facing his two sisters, amber eyes sparking with anger. Dawnstar felt unease in her chest, he looked exactly like Thornstar in this moment, only younger and with less scars. Briarpaw was slightly lower to the ground and refused to make eye contact with her brother. Cherrypaw, however stood tall. Her eyes were steady, she looked a lot like Sandfoot.

"Just because we're the kits of a leader doesn't mean we have free roam to do whatever we want, Thrushpaw." Cherrypaw spoke boldly. Thrushpaw let out a groan.

"It kind of does." He shook his head. "All we're doing is training, what could possibly happen. You heard what Thornstar said. Train at all costs, we must be the best fighters we can be."

Cherrypaw sighed. "Fine then, Thrushpaw." She dropped into a battle crouch and prepared to attack her brother.

"Dawnstar!" Dawnstar heard Yarrowtail's cry but didn't have a chance to react as she thrown to the side and rolled out of her cover. There was a heavy weight on her and familiar laugh in her ear.

"Dawnstar, huh? So that pathetic leader of yours finally died." Thornstar's claws dug into Dawnstar's flank, she felt blood on her fur. Using all her might she shoved Thornstar off, he landed gracefully. Dawnstar faced him, pelt bristling, she glanced over at the three apprentices for a moment.

Thrushpaw had his claws out and teeth bared, his eyes sparkling with alarm. Cherrypaw stood still, giving the SunClan cats a suspicious look and Briarpaw hid behind her sister. Dawnstar realised now that Briarpaw had a scar across her nose and more down her cheek, she felt sick to her stomach. Dawnstar turned back to Thornstar who was laughing.

"You really are a great leader, Dawnstar. Already breaking the warrior code." He shook his head. "And trying to steal my warriors--oh wait, you already did."

Dawnstar unsheathed her claws. "Riverstorm, Silvermoon, Lilyclaw and Haresong left on their own. They didn't want to live in a Clan led by a murderer." She looked at the kits one more time, then back to Thornstar. "And it's time those kits came home as well. They don't need to be raised by a killer."

"My kits love it in AshClan." Thornstar flicked his tail. "They are going to be amazing warriors, and not cowards like SunClan."

"SunClan are not cowards!" Cinderflame spat, her claws were out as well.

"Oh, Cinderflame and Yarrowtail." Thornstar shook his head. "Your father left SunClan, and he made the right choice. He's much happier here."

"I couldn't care less about my father!" Cinderflame hissed. "He's the coward here, and an idiot for believing that you're a good leader."

"You're hurting my feelings." Thornstar's eyes faked hurt. "Come now, Cinderflame. You really want to follow someone like Dawnstar who wanders into an enemy Clan's territory all she wants. Borders do exist, Dawnstar."

"Tell that to yourself." Dawnstar growled. "You crossed into SunClan territory when you first took those kits!"

"They're my kits." Thornstar stuck his muzzle in the air.

"They're Applespot's kits too." Dawnstar stepped forward. "If you ever even cared for Applespots, you will give us the kits!"

"Applespots made her choice to stay in SunClan, she's dead to me now." Thornstar's eyes flashed with a fierce anger, did he ever really love Applespots? Could he love someone like that? "That reminds me...you have kits now don't you Dawnstar?" Dawnstar tensed up, her mind flashed back to Honeykit and Falconkit, sleeping soundly in the SunTree. "Those kits are my kin too, maybe they would be better off in AshClan, than with a lousy mother and leader like--" Dawnstar's anger exploded inside her like thunder, she lept onto Thornstar; taking him by surprise and the two leaders rolled

through the pine needles.

Dawnstar raked her claws down his side and Thornstar clawed her shoulder. "Did I make you mad?" He laughed in her ear, Dawnstar spun on her paws and lashed at his cheek, shoving him to the side.

"You will never lay a claw on my kits!" Dawnstar spat. "And they will never follow you, I don't care if they are your kin they will know nothing of you other than you're a murderer!" Her anger burned inside her, as hot as the sun. "Your own kits shouldn't even know who you are, look at your daughter! She already has a scar on her face!"

"She deserved that scar." Thornstar spat. "She refused to fight with her claws out so I showed her what happens with you show mercy." Dawnstar grew even sicker.

"You hurt your own daughter? You're a monster, Thornstar!" Dawnstar lashed out again, but was pushed to the side. It wasn't a strong attack but she scrambled to her paws and saw Thrushpaw standing over her, eyes burning with hatred.

"Don't you dare speak to my father that way." He growled. "He's a better leader than you'll ever be, you're weak and pathetic!" Dawnstar stood up, towering over the young apprentice. Thornstar had filled Thrushpaw's mind with hatred and evil already, Dawnstar knew she didn't trust this kit.

"Stand down, Thrushpaw." Dawnstar growled.

"You're not my leader." Thrushpaw tried attacking but Cinderflame rushed him and shoved him to the side and pinned him down

"Don't think I won't hurt you just because you're an apprentice, you rat." Cinderflame pinned him, Thrushpaw struggled under her weight.

"Don't just stand there!" He yelled at his siblings, Briarpaw hid more behind her sister. "You just gonna let her insult our father like that!"

"Thrushpaw is right," Thornstar spoke to Cherrypaw and Briarpaw. "Your job is to defend your Clan, you are AshClan apprentices. Now

help me run these intruders out." Dawnstar watched the two she-cats, Cherrypaw looked from Thornstar to the SunClan cats, her eyes conflicted.

"Cherrypaw!" Thrushpaw spat, getting out of Cinderflame's grip. "Why are you just standing there like an idiot!"

Cherrypaw closed her eyes, took a breath and began walking towards the rest of the cats, she looked at her father. "Silvermoon and the others were right in leaving." Shocks of surprise came from all cats. "This isn't what a Clan is supposed to be, SunClan cared enough to come and get us even if it meant risking their lives; twice now. I'm going back to my mother." Thornstar stared, his eyes filled with shock and anger.

"How could you do this, Cherrypaw? The Clan that raised you, your father, your siblings? How could you leave all this?"

"She's not leaving me." Briarpaw's voice a tiny squeak, she quickly ran up to stand beside her sister, her voice trembled as she spoke. "I want to feel safe in my Clan, I don't want to be scared of failing." Cherrypaw looked down at her sister, pride bright in her green eyes.

"I can't believe this." Thornstar dug his claws into the dirt. "My own kits, betraying me."

"You betrayed them, Thornstar." Yarrowtail said loudly. "They're your kits, not just warriors. Maybe show a little bit of respect towards them and they wouldn't be leaving you. Thrushpaw is only staying because he actually believes you are a good leader, but someday he will realize the truth." Dawnstar was shocked at how boldly Yarrowtail was speaking, perhaps that was how he really felt about Rockfur's betrayal but was too scared to speak to his father.

"You don't know anything!" Thurshpaw spat, raking his claws through the dirt and grass. Thornstar lifted his tail, silencing his son.

"It's no use arguing Thrushpaw, if Cherrypaw and Briarpaw want to leave and become SunClan warriors; that's their choice." Dawnstar

narrowed his eyes, no way he would give them up that easily. "If they're SunClan warriors than that means..." He met Dawnstar's gaze; eyes sparking dangerously. "SunClan intruders!" He shouted. "AshClan! Wake up! We have intruders!" He was getting the whole of AshClan to attack them! Dawnstar turned to her party, including the two apprentices.

"Run! We need to get out of here!" Cinderflame was the first, Yarrowtail followed quickly with Briarpaw on his heels. Cherrypaw hesitated, looking at AshClan's camp, Dawnstar could already hear confused voices. "Cherrypaw! If you're coming with us, now is the time to run!" Cherrypaw's eyes flashed with alarm and the tortishell she-cat turned and ran into AshClan's forest, Dawnstar followed her without another glance over her shoulder.

"Run, Dawnstar! Run away like the coward you are! Soon, you won't be able to run away." Thornstar shouted, Dawnstar didn't dare respond. She wasn't sure if the AshClan cats were pursuing them, but they all kept running. She could smell the edge of AshClan territory, they were almost home! The five cats finally crossed the SunClan barrier, safe in their own home. Once they were far enough away from the border they skidded to a stop, all trying to catch their breath.

"Good job, everyone." Dawnstar panted. "I'm proud of all of you." She looked at the two apprentices, Briarpaw was looking around with concern in her eyes and Cherrypaw was staring at her paws.

"It's been so long since we've been in SunClan territory." Cherrypaw said quietly. "What if they don't welcome us back?" Cherrypaw looked up, her green eyes troubled and scared.

"Of course they will," Cinderflame said, nudging her. "You didn't have a choice when you left, I know your mother will be excited to see you, all of SunClan will."

"Cinderflame is right." Dawnstar nodded. "You two chose to leave your father, SunClan will commend you for that." Briarpaw and Cherrypaw shared a hopeful glance.

"I'm excited to see Applespots..." Briarpaw said with a shuffle of her

paws, but for the first time Dawnstar saw a sparkle of excitement in her eyes. Briarpaw no longer had to be scared of her father; Dawnstar would make sure both sisters were cared for in SunClan.

"Let's get you two home." Dawnstar purred and led her small patrol back to camp. Dawn was approaching by the time they entered camp, Sandfoot had already woken up and was organizing patrols. She broke off mid sentence when she saw Dawnstar and the others.

"What are you all doing out?" Her eyes looked over Cinderflame and Yarrowtail, then rested on Cherrypaw and Briarpaw. "Is that..?" Sandfoot ran up to her nieces. "Cherrypaw! Briarpaw!" She nuzzled both of them lovingly. "What are you doing here?" She asked, her eyes glowing as bright as the sun.

"Dawnstar, Cinderflame and Yarrowtail came to get us." Cherrypaw explained, Dawnstar could already see her spirits lifted.

"And these two chose to leave their father and return to SunClan." Dawnstar mewed, looking at the two of them with a soft gaze. They really had given up their life in AshClan to be SunClan cats, Dawnstar was grateful that Thornstar hadn't touched these two cat's minds.

"I need to go wake Applespots!" Sandfoot turned on her paws and ran into the warriors den, Dawnstar noticed Cherrypaw tense up a bit. She was still concerned about seeing her mother again, but Dawnstar already knew what Applespot's reactions would be. Sandfoot was nearly pushing Applespots out of the den, the queen's eyes were groggy with sleep.

"What in the name of StarClan are you doing, Sandfoot?" Applespots asked through a yawn, annoyance lining her mew.

"Just look over there, Applespots." Sandfoot turned her towards her kits, it took Applespots eyes a moment to adjust but then she realized. Her eyes went wide and she was suddenly awake, Applespots made it to her kits in a few short bounds.

"Cherrypaw! Briarpaw!" She wailed with joy. "My kits!" She nuzzled all over them, they weren't as small as when they left but they must

have been to Applespots. "You're home!" Cherrypaw and Briarpaw returned their mother's affection. Applespots stepped back, her happy gaze dropping a bit. "Where's Thrushpaw?"

Briarpaw dropped her head, it was Cherrypaw who spoke. "Thrushpaw wanted to stay with our father." She said softly.

"They have the same mind..." Applespots said sadly, she closed her eyes for a moment then opened them again. "At least I have my daughters home. I'm so glad you're home." She nuzzled her two daughters again then stopped at Briarpaw. "What happened to you?" She looked at the white scars on Briarpaw's face, she looked away, flattening her ears.

"Thornstar..." She said as a whimper. Applespots pressed against her kit, licking her scars softly.

"Well I can promise you, Briarpaw." Dawnstar spoke. "Your father will never be able to do that again, you are safe in SunClan." Briarpaw looked at Dawnstar, her eyes soft and thankful.

Applespots broke away and turned to Dawnstar. "Thank you so much, Dawnstar. Thank you for bringing my kits home to me." The look in Applespot's eyes warmed Dawnstar's heart, she had done something important for another cat in her Clan, perhaps Applespots would return to her old self now, Dawnstar prayed to StarClan that she would.

"I'm going to assign the two of you mentors after the Clan wakes up, so they can welcome you back as well." Dawnstar explained to the two apprentices. "For now, go get some sleep in the apprentice den, We have a few of our warriors, our three apprentices and the AshClan warriors that ran in there, but they will all welcome you."

"Oh yeah!' Cherrypaw exclaimed. "Rosekit, Earthkit and Mudkit are all apprentices now too!" Cherrypaw nudged her sister. "Let's go! Plus, Silvermoon is there! She was always nice to us." Briarpaw nodded excitedly and the two she-cats hurried to the apprentice den. They already seemed to be getting used to being back in SunClan.

"Who are you going to chose to be their new mentors?" Applespots asked, clearly concerned for the well-being of her kits.

Dawnstar puffed out her chest a bit. "I have the perfect choice for both of them."

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Dawnstar called out, it was early morning and most of SunClan was now awake. They had all welcomed Cherrypaw and Briarpaw the way she thought they would, with warmth and love. "As you all know by now, Cherrypaw and Briarpaw have left their father's side and chosen to return to their home in SunClan." She began, SunClan let out a chorus of excited cheers and mews. "And now that they are apprentices, they're going to need some new mentors. I have chosen two cats who I believe will train these two apprentices to be the best SunClan warriors they can be. Cherrypaw!" The tortishell she-cat looked up, green eyes wide and excited. "Your new mentor will be Cinderflame, I trust that she will teach you everything she knows about the warrior code." She had already spoke to the mentors before the meeting, so it wasn't a surprise to them and they were ready. Cinderflame stepped forward and touched noses to Cherrypaw. "And Briarpaw, your new mentor will be Yarrowtail." Yarrowtail stepped forward, he still seemed a bit shy, but he approached Briarpaw with confidence. "Yarrowtail, I know that you will teach Briarpaw everything she needs to know and more." Yarrowtail and Briarpaw touched noses, both cats were quiet and reserved and Dawnstar hoped that Yarrowtail would help her get comfortable with herself, he was gentle cat.

"Cherrypaw! Briarpaw! Cherrypaw! Briarpaw!" The Clan cheered loudly, all were excited that these two apprentices were back in their rightful home. Dawnstar watched as Cherrypaw bounced around excitedly with Earthpaw and Rosepaw, denmates reunited. Briarpaw watched from a distance with soft, happy eyes. She was still shy, but at least she was happy. Dawnstar looked over Clan, feeling that even after the fire; SunClan was better and stronger than ever.

Chapter 44

The sky was empty, not a single star, just darkness. Dawnstar's eyes searched the sky for any sign of StarClan, but Silverpelt had seemingly vanished. The only thing in the sky was the half-moon, but it wasn't glowing very brightly. Dawnstar removed her eyes from the sky and tried to figure out where she was. Without the light of the the stars and moon, she could barely make out any of her surroundings. She extended her claws and learned she was standing in grass, she sniffed the air but couldn't smell anything familiar.

Dawnstar took a cautious step forward, dead grass crunched under the weight of her paws. With a flick of her tail, Dawnstar moved forward making sure to test every step. There was no sound other than her breathing and pawsteps which she tried to keep quiet just in case any cats were lurking around. Dawnstar kept herself low to the ground, unease prickled up her spine. Something wasn't right.

"Scared, Dawnstar?" A voice whispered in her ear. Dawnstar lept forward in alarm, claws extended and teeth bared. A cat she had never seen before stood before her, he was a large cat with a long winding scar down his foreleg and another one across the bridge of his nose. His amber eyes were dark and full of malice.

"Who are you?" Dawnstar demanded, standing up tall. She had no idea who this cat was, but he had the same pale brown pelt as Thornstar.

"I thought you were supposed to be smart." He sneered. "It should be obvious, you named your kit after me."

Dawnstar's ears flattened. "Falconclaw." She growled his name, the name that had been avoided in SunClan.

"So hostile." He flicked his tail. "I figured you'd be happy to see me, you did name your son after me afterall."

"We named him that so SunClan could forget your name!" Dawnstar spat, jumping in defense of her son.

The scene around Dawnstar and Falconclaw changed, they were suddenly in the SunTree, Dawnstar saw herself curled up with Lionclaw, Honeykit and Falconkit were lying on top of each other as they always did. "Your son is young, but he could choose any path he wants. Maybe he'll realize that his mother is a fool."

"Stay away from my kit!" Dawnstar swiped at Falconclaw, he quickly ducked out of the way. She noticed Falconkit twitch, as if he had heard her shout.

"Calm down, Dawnstar." He chuckled. "Don't want to wake your son." Dawnstar stood protectively over her two kits, Falconclaw shook his head. "Watch your back Dawnstar, because just as your precious Flowerstar said...there's a storm coming and I'd hate to see you fail so miserably." Falconclaw's body began to fade, and Dawnstar was sitting up in her den. Her eyes instantly went to Honeykit and Falconkit, both were sleeping soundly. She let out a quiet sigh and pulled her kits closer to her, Falconkit let out a mew of complaint but didn't wake up.

"Don't worry, Falconkit..." She whispered. "I won't let anything touch you, I promise. Not Thornstar, not Falconclaw...no one. I'll protect you." She nuzzled her son and fell into a restless, and dreamless sleep.

Dawnstar slept for a while more, and when she woke up she heard Honeykit and Falconkit playing outside, Lionclaw had already left the den. She stood up and stretched her limbs, letting out a yawn. Her dream with Falconclaw still pricked at her pelt, but she tried to shake it off. She made her way out of her den and looked into the camp. It was just before sunhigh and the camp was lively, the warriors den had been completely repaired and even expanded to welcome the AshClan warriors into it. They had been welcomed and accepted into SunClan and even seemed like normal members. Cherrypaw and Briarpaw also fit right in, they were glad to be back with the friends they had as kits and their mentors were training them well.

Briarpaw was still a bit skittish, but she was being a lot more friendly with the other apprentices, Dawnstar knew she had picked Yarrowtail well. They already had a bit of training in AshClan, but they were taught to be ruthless and they had to learn how to fight in SunClan, Cherrypaw struggled more so with that but she was coming along well.

Dawnstar spotted Squirreltail sitting outside the medicine cat den with Brackenclaw at her side, her eyes were no longer sealed shut by herbs but they were glossy and still had the burn marks around them. Squirreltail wasn't completely blind, but everything she saw was blurry. Dawnstar still wasn't sure what to do with Squirreltail, she couldn't hunt or fight with her vision but Dawnstar didn't want her to feel useless. Squirreltail had kept a very high spirit however, she was a respectable cat. In the half-moon that Cherrypaw and Briarpaw had been living in SunClan Applespots had returned to normal warrior duties, she was finally happy again.

Dawnstar looked over her Clan with pride, they were thriving even after the fire. The camp still bore burn marks, and the nursery would still need some time to be built but prey was running again, even with the slow approach of leaf-bare. Leaf-fall had officially arrived, but they were gathering as much prey as they could.

"Dawnstar!" Dawnstar turned and saw Lionclaw bounded over to her, she let out a purr when she saw him. "Good news, Pebblestep cleared me for patrols and hunting." His eyes glowed brightly, he had been restricted to camp for so long, Dawnstar knew it was driving him crazy. Lionclaw flexed his claws. "I'm so excited to get back into the forest!" He announced.

"You should go get yourself on a patrol then." Dawnstar touched her muzzle to his forehead and the golden tom bounced off to find Sandfoot. Dawnstar had been starting to miss hunting and patrols more, she had been staying in camp with her kits, and she loved her kits but she also missed hunting with Lionclaw. She let out a small sigh and looked at her playing kits, but she wouldn't give them up for anything.

After speaking with Lionclaw, Sandfoot padded up to Dawnstar. "I wanted to ask you about the gathering tonight, who are we going to

be taking?" She questioned. Dawnstar had completely forgotten about the gathering, this would be her first gathering as leader. ""Uh," she stammered suddenly nervous. "I don't want to take Cherrypaw or Briarpaw just because I don't want AshClan to cause any problems but we can take the other three apprentices. Then Snakewhisker, Lionclaw, Turtleblaze, Applespots, Willownose, Adderstrike, Bramblepelt, and Snowtail and Flamepetal can come. I don't want to leave the camp undefended, I still don't trust Thornstar not to attack."

Sandfoot nodded. "I don't think any of us do, I'll let those cats know." The tortoiseshell deputy turned away and left Dawnstar to think. She was suddenly nervous about the gathering, she would be leading the gathering and making all the announcements. Giving a Clan meeting to SunClan was one thing, but announcing things in front of all four Clans gave her chills. Especially since she would be up there with Thornstar who she hadn't seen or heard anything from since Cherrypaw and Briarpaw came home. Dawnstar sighed, she knew she would have to do it; and she would also have to announce the death of Flowerstar; the only leader who didn't already know, however was Jaggedstar. SunClan and LichenClan never really interacted due to how far their borders were. Dawnstar shook her head, the gathering wasn't for a while yet, she had some time to clear her mind.

Clearing her mind included batting around a moss ball with her kits, she realized just how much she loved playing with them. Honeykit and Falconkit worked together to beat their mother and Dawnstar of course went easy on them, they played for a while and before she knew it; it was time for the gathering. Lilyclaw agreed to keep an eye on Honeykit and Falconkit while Dawnstar was gone.

"I wanna go to the gathering!" Falconkit complained.

"You're not old enough." Dawnstar had told him, trying to keep him from making an escape to come to the gathering. Lilyclaw promised to keep them busy, Dawnstar admired Lilyclaw, she knew that she loved and missed her own kits; but Dawnstar couldn't take her kits away from AshClan, not when they were born there.

Dawnstar left Lilyclaw with her kits and gathered her patrol for the

Gathering. After every cat was ready, they set off. Lionclaw walked on one side of Dawnstar, Sandfoot on the other side. She felt like leader, guiding her Clan to the Gathering Hollow, perhaps this wouldn't be so difficult after all. They crossed the river, reaching the makeshift camp they had lived in after the fire. It already seemed like forever ago. The gathering hollow rose in the distance, she could see the four trees rising high above the rest of the hollow. Tonight, Dawnstar would be taking her place on the SunClan tree.

SunClan were the last Clan to arrive, but she didn't think that the other Clans had been here much longer. Thornstar was conversing with Jaggedstar, but Shadowstar didn't seem too keen on talking with Thornstar, maybe Shadowstar actually understood that Thornstar was trouble. As Dawnstar approached the other leaders, Shadowstar spotted her.

"Dawnstar!" He called out. "Welcome!" He padded up to her, clearly grateful to have another leader to talk to.

"Dawnstar?" Jaggedstar echoed. "What happened to Flowerstar?" His amber eyes grew sad for a moment.

Dawnstar lowered her head. "We lost Flowerstar unfortunately." She said, recalling the death of her leader and suddenly missing her. Her fears about the gathering swarmed her once again, she dug her claws into the soil. "I'll explain more when the gathering starts."

"Then I suggest we start." Shadowstar said, the other three leaders agreed and headed to their respective trees. Dawnstar looked up at the SunClan tree, taking a deep breath she quickly climbed it. Sitting in the top branch, so she was level with the other three leaders. The AshClan tree was right next to the SunClan tree, and Thornstar wasn't making eye contact with any of the other's leader, but something burned in his eyes, Dawnstar grew uneasy. "Dawnstar." Dawnstar's attention was snapped away from Thornstar, she looked at Shadowstar. "Since you're the new leader, why don't you start?"

Dawnstar nodded and looked out over the hollow, cats from all Clans were gazing up at her. She swallowed her nerves and began to speak. "Well, as you can see--"

"Speak up!" Fieldfoot, a LichenClan elder shouted, Barksong nodded beside him. Dawnstar lifted her head and tried to speak louder.

"As you can see, Flowerstar has joined the ranks of StarClan. SunClan suffered a fire in our territory and Flowerstar didn't make it out." The four Clans lowered their heads, giving a moment of silence for the fallen leader, when they all lifted their heads Dawnstar began speaking again, she wanted to make SunClan seem strong despite the loss. "Despite everything, SunClan still remains strong. Prey is running well and our camp is coming together again."

"I'm glad to hear that things are going well." Shadowstar purred kindly, he was being very welcoming and Dawnstar was incredibly grateful.

"I also want to thank the MoonClan warriors that came to our aid when we needed it, SunClan is forever thankful." Dawnstar saw the MoonClan warriors lift their heads in pride and joy.

"MoonClan was happy to help." Shadowstar mewed. "Now, Thornstar, would you like to go next?"

Thornstar shook his head. "I'd like to go last actually, if none of the other leaders mind." He made eye contact with Dawnstar, something was brewing in his gaze, Dawnstar dug her claws into the branch she was sitting on.

"Very well..." Shadowstar said awkwardly. "I suppose I will go next," He stood up. "MoonClan is thriving, Pigeonpelt has retired to the elder's den and Ebonywing just had three healthy kits." The Clans cheered kindly for the new kits and the retired elder. Shadowstar turned to the LichenClan leader. "Jaggedstar?"

Jaggedstar stood up and began to speak. "We welcome two new apprentices; Foxpaw and Rosepaw." The four Clans cheered the new warriors, Dawnstar felt warm knowing all the Clans were being civil tonight.

"Now it's my turn." Thornstar stood up before Jaggedstar could sit down, the old leader shot a glare but sat down anyway. Dawnstar's

set her eyes on Thornstar, wondering what he had to say. "My fellow warriors," He spoke. "Leaf-bare is approaching fast, and with leaf-bare comes great struggles for all four Clans. Prey is low and sickness is high, no matter the Clan; we all struggle."

"What's your point, Thornstar?" Jaggedstar questioned.

"My point, Jaggedstar, and is that if the Clans are going to keep surviving these harsh leaf-bare seasons then we need to work together." Thornstar spoke, Dawnstar dug her claws deeper into the branch. What was he even suggesting. "I have come up with a plan, that all four Clans band together and work to live through this season with plenty of prey and no deaths."

"The Clans have survived many leaf-bares on their own." Shadowstar pointed out. "We always do, leaf-bare is just another struggle we have to face, it's part of being a warrior." Many cats nodded in agreement.

"AshClan was nearly wiped out by greencough last leaf-bare, and I won't allow that to happen." Thornstar said boldly. "It's my plan to come together as one Clan, that also eliminates battles and border disputes, it will be an era of peace!" Dawnstar clawed her branch harder, she wanted to speak out but she held her tongue, the other leaders wouldn't go for this crazy plan.

"Who would lead us? You?" Jaggedstar challenged, clearly annoyed by his antics.

"All of us of course." Thornstar's response was a purr.

"Liar!" Dawnstar spat, no longer able to hold herself back, the rest of the Clans looked directly at her. "There's no way you would lead an in unison with the other leaders."

Thornstar shook his head. "Dawnstar, you're only a new leader; you wouldn't understand."

"I may be a new leader but I know you." Dawnstar growled. "Probably better than any other cat and I know there's no way you would lead alongside three other leaders. You were willing to break

the warrior code to become leader, there's no way you would throw that away to share a leadership."

"You're talking nonsense, Dawnstar." Thornstar shook his head, Dawnstar's rage burned intensely inside her.

"You're a murderer! I know once I agreed to this insane plan of yours, you would kill me. You've threatened me enough." She met the gaze of Thornstar, behind him she could see Jaggedstar and Shadowstar sharing uneasy glances.

"You have no proof of that fact, Dawnstar." He turned his nose in the air, was he really acting this nonchalant.

"I watched you try to murder my leader! You killed Lionstar!" Gapsp spread throughout the cats.

"Why would you even think that?" Thornstar demanded.

"Riverstorm told me! The four cats that you drove out of their own Clan because you're such a murderous leader. Not only did you kill Lionstar but you killed Moonwhisker and Sharptongue. AshClan doesn't even have a medicine cat! Skypaw, Ravenpaw and Puddlepaw were made apprentices before six moons old so were the three kits you stole from SunClan. You're a disgusting leader and horrible excuse for a cat!" Dawnstar unleashed all her anger onto Thornstar. "That's just in AshClan, I could go on and on about what you did to SunClan."

"Enough of your nonsense, Dawnstar." Thornstar turned away, facing the other two leaders. "Since she so rudely declined me, what are your answers."

"Your plan is idiotic." Jaggedstar shook his head. 'I've been leading LichenClan for many moons just fine myself, and there have always been four Clans."

"Change is coming, Jaggedstar." Thornstar sighed. "I suppose what I'm saying is that the Clans *will* come together. If you don't want to lead with me in peace...then there will be no peace. Any cat who rejects this idea, will die at my claws." He raised his voice. "To any

cats interested in my era of peace, you don't have to follow your leaders cluelessness. In three days I want to meet back here with the answer of every cat." Thornstar turned back to Dawnstar, his gaze digging deep into hers. "I hope you're prepared to say no, because I have a force with me and I promise that any cat who joins will live with a strong, safe, Clan and any cat who refuses will live in terror before they die."

"You're threatening every cat in the Clans if they don't join you? You really expect them to listen?" Dawnstar questioned.

"Yes, I do, Dawnstar. Some of these cats are actually smart enough to know what's good for them and their Clans." Thornstar explained. "And they will be rewarded greatly if they take my side; the most honorable warriors."

"I refuse to listen to this any longer." Jaggedstar jumped down from his tree. "You're spouting nonsense, Thornstar. LichenClan is leaving."

"I expect the three other Clans to meet back here in three days with your final answers, if any of you refuse then it will be the last day you breathe." Thornstar shouted. "I'm expecting great things."

Shadowstar jumped down as well. "You're clueless, Thornstar." He swiftly led his Clan away, leaving Dawnstar and Thornstar alone in the trees.

"Chose wisely, Dawnstar, but it seems as if SunClan will be completely falling to me. Such a shame." He shook his head and jumped down, Dawnstar looked up at the full moon; not a single cloud in the sky. *Why didn't StarClan stop this?*

Dawnstar led her warriors home and the news was instantly buzzing around camp, Thornstar's proposal spread like fire. She had to make an announcement to her Clan, Dawnstar jumped into the SunTree and didn't even have to summon the Clan.

"What's going on?" Icepteal asked.

"Did Thornstar really challenge all three Clans?" Rainears

demanded.

"Give me a moment to explain, please." Dawnstar said, silencing her Clan. "Yes, it's true. Thornstar said that all the Clans should band together into one Clan to make survival easier. None of the leaders were having it; but he wants us to go back to the Gathering Hollow in three days with our answer."

"What's your answer?" Adderstrike questioned.

"Absolutely not, SunClan will not be joining in with him because I know that Thornstar would try and kill me no matter what, almost any cat from SunClan as a matter-of-fact." Dawnstar explained. "SunClan won't be joining him."

"So what are we going to do?" Bramblepelt asked, flicking his tail.

"Fight obviously." Lionclaw stepped forward. "Thornstar said that any cat who didn't join would regret it, so he's looking for a fight."

"Lionclaw's right, any cat who doesn't join will be put into a fight." Dawnstar mewed. "And we must meet this fight."

"If all the other Clans refuse, it's three Clans against one." Redclaw pointed out. "How does he expect to stand a chance."

"Loners and rouges." The Clan turned to Lilyclaw, the first of the AshClan warriors to speak up.

"Loners and rouges?" Crowfur echoed.

"Yes, before I turned away from Echoheart I knew she had been recruiting loners and rouges around the forest to join AshClan; they've been planning this for a long time. That's when I knew that I couldn't stay in AshClan anymore." Lilyclaw explained.

"I never knew that." Riverstorm stepped forward. "Then again, Echoheart stopped trusting me a while ago."

"On that subject..." Rustpelt stood up. "What are we going to do about the AshClan warriors? Can they really fight their own Clanmates? Their brothers and mates?"

"Ashblaze would never stand beside Thornstar in this kind of fight." Silvermoon mewed. "And neither would my brother, when the time comes they will stand beside us."

"What if they're too scared?" Rustpelt demanded.

"They really won't have anything to lose, do they?" Haresong mewed. "The ones with true hearts will step forward and fight with us."

"And Dawnstar," Riverstorm looked up at the SunTree. "You have our completely loyalty right now. I will fight until the death to restore peace and harmony to my Clan." Dawnstar felt a jolt of admiration for Riverstorm and her fellow warriors, they were willing to give everything for their Clan.

"SunClan thanks you for your loyalty, and I personally trust each and everyone of you." Dawnstar spoke boldly, her words seemed to affect the other SunClan warriors because each of them nodded.

"We will fight too." Cherrypaw spoke up from the back of the ground, even Briarpaw held her head high.

"I don't want the rest of the forest to have to deal with my father's tyranny." Briarpaw's voice was loud.

Feeling empowered, Dawnstar lifted her head and raised her voice. "SunClan will not be joining Thornstar, and we will emerge from this fight victorious. We will fight Thornstar and his forces until death if we have to. SunClan will never fall!"

SunClan jumped up and cheered loudly, Dawnstar had inspired them. This was the storm she had been warned about, but just like the fire SunClan would not fall.

Chapter 45

"I want every single cat training. No matter how old of a warrior or how young of an apprentice, we all need the training." Dawnstar spoke to her Clan boldy. "We have less than three days before we are going to fight Thornstar." Dawnstar had instantly started preparing for Thornstar's attack when they rejected his offer. When cats weren't hunting or patrolling they were training. "Thornstar fights to kill and his warriors will be as well, I don't want you to have to kill a cat; but be prepare to." Dawnstar knew Thornstar's fighting style better than any other cat, he had trained her.

"For now, I want Bramblepelt, Rainears and Crowfur in charge of training." Sandfoot stepped forward. "Take small groups throughout the day and do a good session of training. I want every cat to get at least five sessions before the fight."

"Dawnstar," Dawnstar turned and saw Turtleblaze and Fawnheart standing before her. "We want to talk to you about Mudpaw and Earthpaw."

Dawnstar turned to face them. "What about them?"
"We don't want them fighting in this battle," Fawnheart said, her eyes filled with motherly concern. "They're going to fight later on, but I don't want them in the heart of the battle." Dawnstar thought for a moment, Earthpaw and Mudpaw really hadn't been apprentices for very long, they probably shouldn't be fighting.

"Very well," Dawnstar nodded, getting an idea. "What if they helped Pebblestep and the other medicine cats? You know they will object to not being able to fight; but perhaps this will let be helpful while staying away from the fighting."

Fawnheart shared a glance with Turtleblaze for a few heartbeats before they both turned back to Dawnstar. "They works perfectly." Turtleblaze mewed. "Why don't you go tell them, and Pebblestep away." He said to Fawnheart, she touched her nose to his before

slowly padding away, then he looked at his sister. "You know, Dawnstar. This is going to be an extreme fight." He began. "Are you ready to lead SunClan in this kind of fight?" His eyes were filled with doubt and concern.

Dawnstar's stomach ached, was Turtleblaze really considering not fighting? Her own brother? "The only other choice is give in to Thornstar and that really isn't an option. If I do that, I'm giving up my own life, the lives of my kits and everyone else I'm close to. You know this, Thornstar only wants to see me dead."

"I'm not saying you're making a mistake." Turtleblaze mewed. "This is just going to be a terrible battle, I can feel it. I know we can't give in, and I will stand beside you until the very end but you have to understand...we may not come back from this."

Dawnstar lowered her head, Turtleblaze was right. There was a complete possibility that Dawnstar could fail, and if she did...then SunClan would fall. She shook her head. "I can't think about that, Turtleblaze. I can't think about losing, I can only focus on winning. I have to hold onto hope, not just for SunClan but for all Clans, Thornstar will tear them all apart if we give in." Turtleblaze closed his eyes and let out a small sigh, for a moment Dawnstar was concerned that he was disappointed, then he opened his eyes and they filled with a gentle glow.

"I'm proud of you, Dawnstar." He mewed, touching her cheek with his muzzle. "And I know that everyone else is too."

Dawnstar pressed close to her brother. "Thank you, Turtleblaze."

"Dawnstar!" She heard Snakewhisker's call and she turned, letting out a small gasp at who she saw with him. Behind Snakewhisker was Shadowstar, Violetfur and Jayfur. "Shadowstar said he wanted to speak with you."

Dawnstar left her brother's side and approached the MoonClan leader, he dipped her respectfully which she copied. "What is it, Shadowstar?"

"I've been thinking and I believe that we should all join together."

He spoke, Dawnstar dropped her ears.

"You're seriously considering Thornstar's plan?" Dawnstar asked, her jaw dropping. Shadowstar had been so clear!

The black tom shook his head. "No, not join him, I'd rather die then let him take control over MoonClan; I mean SunClan, MoonClan and LichenClan. We fight together and work together to keep our Clans alive and defeat Thornstar."

"We were already considering something like this." Dawnstar admitted. "I was hoping that both you and Jaggedstar would agree."

"Our two medicine cats also agreed to come together, share herbs and the amount of wounds that we will be dealing with." Shadowstar explained. "Would Pebblestep be willing to do that as well?"

"Would Pebblestep be willing to do what?" Dawnstar jumped a but as Pebblestep approached them, whiskers twitching.

"Share herbs with Mossleaf and Ravenheart and help care for the wounded cats in the battle." Shadowstar explained.

"Of course I would." Pebblestep dipped her head. "Where will we be set up? And where we will put our kits and elders? SunClan camp would not be a smart place." Dawnstar agreed, if any of the camps were to be attacked; it would be SunClan.

"We can keep them in MoonClan territory, chances are AshClan cats won't know how to swim across the river and we can cut of any way of crossing." Violetfur offered. Dawnstar grew uneasy at the thought that her kits would be in enemy territory, but she had to agree it would be much safer than SunClan camp.

"Very well, before we leave we will make sure that our kits and elders are in MoonClan territory." Dawnstar agreed, semi-stubbornly.

"Don't worry, Dawnstar." Jayfur spoke softly. "Your kits will be safe in MoonClan, we won't leave them without protection."

"That reminds me." Pebblestep spoke up. "I don't want Lionclaw fighting in the battle, his wound could easily get ripped back open."

"He can come to MoonClan territory as well." Shadowstar offered. "If worse comes to worse then it will be extra protection, but he won't be fighting unless absolutely necessary." Pebblestep nodded.

"I'll also have two apprentices helping me carry wounded cats from the battlefield." Pebblestep explained. "If both MoonClan and LichenClan could offer two cats to help the medicine cats it would help a lot."

"We don't have any apprentices at the moment, and neither does LichenClan but we can offer Mosswind and Icefur." Violetfur said. "They would be glad to help."

"And I'll speak to Jaggedstar about him offering his newest warriors." Shadowstar added.

"Then it's settled." Dawnstar mewed. "Kits and elders will be protected in MoonClan territory and the medicine cats will be working together."

"Then we must head back to our territory," Shadowstar dipped his head. "Thank you for listening, Dawnstar. If we remain strong, then we can defeat Thornstar."

"Cloudspots, tuck in your tail." Dawnstar commanded, the silver and white warrior obeyed. "Now Flamepetal, try and knock him over." The ginger she-cat shot forward, going for Cloudspots's legs, but he held them firm. When she tried to knock him down, Cloudspots turned and hit his paw into her shoulder, she stumbled backwards and Cloudspots regained his stance. "Good job, Cloudspots." Dawnstar praised her former apprentice. "Flamepetal, you can't always rely on your own paws. Use your teeth; nip at Cloudspots's hind leg, if you get it just right he will go down."

Dawnstar moved in quickly towards Cloudspots, avoiding his attack and she gently nipped at the strong tendon at the back of his leg, it wasn't long before Cloudspots was on the ground, dust rising from the ground around him. "Don't bit too hard however, you could do

some serious damage. At least not on your Clanmates." Dawnstar flicked her tail then looked over at Brackenpelt and Heatherflight. "Now you two try it and I want you to try it again." She motioned towards Cloudspots and Flamepetal. When you get it right, switch positions." Dawnstar sat back and watched the two groups of warriors try and knock each other down.

Heatherflight quickly knocked down her brother, and it took Flamepetal a bit longer but eventually Cloudspots was back on the ground. Both groups switched places, Brackenpelt knocked his sister down with ease as did Cloudspots with Flamepetal. Flamepetal let out a small curse and got back on her paws. "Now, Cloudspots with Brackenpelt and Flamepetal with Heatherflight." They switched, and once again it was Flamepetal who struggled. Dawnstar narrowed her eyes. "Flamepetal with Brackenpelt and Heatherflight with Cloudspots." She wanted to make sure they each got a turn with each other. This time, Flamepetal could barely get Brackenpelt on the ground, she hissed in frustration.

"Flamepetal." Dawnstar stood up and went to the ginger she-cat's side. "What's going on with you?" Flamepetal looked up at her, annoyance cracking in her green eyes.

"Nothing." She growled, Dawnstar frowned.

"Come with me, you lot keep practicing. Practice some other moves." Dawnstar nudged Flamepetal forward, the she-cat begrudgingly followed. When they were far enough away, Dawnstar turned to her. "What's going on? I know you can fight better than this, Lionclaw always told me what a good fighter you were."Flamepetal flattened her ears, but didn't speak. Dawnstar sighed. "Is it the battle? Are you scared?"Flamepetal lowered her head and Dawnstar knew that was the problem. "It's okay to be scared, Flamepetal."

"I know I promised to give my life to SunClan when I became a warrior; but I don't want to die. I'm scared to die, I'm scared to lose my family or friends in this battle and I don't want to." Flampetal's voice cracked with emotion.

"I understand, Flamepetal but it's all part of being a warrior."

Dawnstar sat beside Flamepetal. "When I was just a kit I lose my sister, Willowkit to deathberries." Flamepetal lifted her head, eyes sad.

"You did? I never heard of Willowkit..." Flamepetal mewed quietly.

Dawnstar nodded. "And right before I became a warrior I lost both my parents." Dawnstar's mind flashed back to her parents.

"I remember that, that's when Thornstar became deputy." Flamepetal said. "And you earned your warrior name."

Dawnstar nodded once more. "Yes and I was absolutely torn up by the loss of my sister and parents, but it's all a risk we must face. We are warriors and we have to fight to protect the forest, Flamepetal. When I became leader; both Willowkit and my parents were each one of my nine lives. Lionclaw lost both his parents as well." Flamepetal looked at her paws. "We could lose many cats in this battle and that is a very scary thought, I know." Dawnstar sighed. She was scared too, scared to fail her Clan, fail her own destiny but she stayed strong for Flamepetal. "But that just means we have to fight harder to protect ourselves and the ones we love and even if we do lose someone; they will always be with us in StarClan."

Flamepetal stared at her paws. "I had a nightmare that Heatherflight died and it scared me; she and Brackenpelt are my best friends."

"I understand." Dawnstar brushed her tail over Flamepetal's shoulders. "Then protect them as much as you possibly can; fight for them." Flamepetal looked up, her eyes brighter and more relaxed.

"I will, Dawnstar. Thank you." Flamepetal stood up. "I want to get back to training." She said with a new life in her meow. Dawnstar nodded and they returned to their training session, Flamepetal instantly improved and was fighting hard now. Dawnstar knew she had inspired the young cat, she just hoped it would be enough.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Dawnstar called from a top the SunTree, her Clan quickly gathered. "Tomorrow is the day we face

Thornstar, and I want to say that I am so proud of each and everyone of you." Flamepetal nodded her head, sitting close by her siblings. Earthpaw and Mudpaw sat near Fawnheart and Turtleblaze and Yarrowtail, Cinderflame and Pebblestep were all together. She had never seen her Clan come together like this. "You've all trained so hard, and I know that we can do this. Thornstar doesn't stand a chance against a united force. We have something that Thornstar never will; and that's unity and harmony. SunClan are a strong force, and we will not be knocked down!" The cats of SunClan cheered, the fire of battle raged in their eyes.

Cinderflame stood up. "There's something I want to say, if I may?" She looked up at Dawnstar who nodded in approval. What did Cinderflame have to say? "SunClan has struggled a lot, we've faced treachery, loss and almost lost our camp to a fire; but each time something bad happens we come back stronger than ever. It doesn't matter how hard we have to fight, how long we have to fight, because SunClan *will* win! And we will return a force to be reckoned with!" The Clan cheered again, Dawnstar was glad Cinderflame spoke as well; these cats needed all the motivation they needed.

"We've trained long and we've trained hard." Dawnstar called out. "Get your rest tonight, and tomorrow we will take Thornstar down!" The cats of SunClan cheered once more, Dawnstar could feel energy buzzing through her veins, SunClan was strong, they were determined, and Dawnstar would make sure to lead them to victory.

Chapter 46

"It's time to go, SunClan." Dawnstar announced. "We're going to MoonClan territory first so our elders and kits can stay there. Then we will meet up with Jaggedstar and the rest of LichenClan then head to the Gathering Hollow." Dawnstar relayed the plan. "If there's anything to remember from our training is make sure you don't die, Thornstar and his warriors will be fighting to kill." The cats of SunClan nodded, Dawnstar did one last check to make sure that every SunClan warrior was accounted for. Hawktalon stood with Squirreltail and Nightwing, Earthpaw, Mudpaw and Pebblestep had had mouthfuls of herbs, every herb that SunClan had in stock.

"Then it's time to leave." Dawnstar announced and began guiding her Clan out of the camp; if any warriors decided to attack SunClan camp they would find it abandoned; not a single warrior would remain. SunClan pushed through their territory to the MoonClan border, they had set up an easy way to cross. It was still early in the day, just past dawn. They had to be there before sunhigh. Dawnstar crossed easily, she remembered crossing this river the first time she had gone to the Moonstone, the first time that Thornstar had tried to kill her by making her fall into the river to drown. She was recalling a lot about her life before now.

First becoming an apprentice, collecting moss and exploring the territory, everything would've been better if Sunstream never died. Then Dawnstar figured that if she had never been Thornstar's apprentice, she may never have learned of his treachery and it would SunClan he would be leading into darkness. Dawnstar sighed, everything that had happened in her life had happened for a reason; even Willowkit's death. Everything had led up to this moment, to her destiny. The prophecy rang in her ears, *When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun*. The forest was in danger; was it Dawnstar's time to blaze brighter than the sun? Dawnstar dug her claws into the soil, this was her destiny. To lead SunClan and the other Clans to victory.

The SunClan warriors soon reached MoonClan's camp, she had never been here before. It was a clearing and most of the dens seemed to be burrows with the exception of the leader's den and medicine cat den.

"Welcome, SunClan." Shadowstar dipped his head respectfully when he spotted the other Clan. "I've spoken with Jaggedstar and him and his Clan will be meeting us just before the Gathering Hollow." He explained.

"Sounds like a plan." Dawnstar looked around. "Where exactly will my kits be staying?" Dawnstar questioned, Honeykit and Falconkit were being carried by their father and uncle at the moment, talking in awe about being in another Clan's territory.

Shadowstar motioned towards a den between two trees. "Your kits along with Nightkit, Seedkit and Onekit will all be staying in my den along with the elders and that cats who cannot fight. It's a large den and it will be protected."

"I wanna meet the other kits!" Falconkit forced himself from Lionclaw's jaws but his father quickly caught him.

"You will be meeting them; but Ebonywing's kits are only a few days old." Shadowstar explained kindly. "You will be staying in a den with him and some other cats." Falconkit snorted.

"MoonClan smells weird." He complained.

"Show some respect." Dawnstar scolded her son over her shoulder. "They're allowing you to stay here so you're safe."

"I'd be safer if I could fight." Falconkit stuck his nose in the air.

"We're too young to fight." Honeykit mewed as Turtleblaze set her down.

"But I wanna help!" Falconkit complained.

"You will be helping, little one." Shadowstar purred. "You will be in charge of protecting the younger kits. Don't let anything hurt them, alright?" Falconkit's expression instantly changed. He puffed out his

tiny chest and lifted his head.

"I promise nothing will get to them!" Falconkit marched around his sister proudly, Honeykit let out a purr of amusement. Dawnstar let out a content sigh, she was glad her kits weren't scared. They should be safe here, Dawnstar trusted the MoonClan warriors.

"Now that that is settled," Sandfoot step forward. "Is there anything else we need to make sure of?" The deputy questioned.

"We have most everything planned out." Violetfur replied. "All that's left is well...you know." Violetfur shared an uneasy glance with Shadowstar.

"Yes that is all that's left." Shadowstar said, then raised his voice. "Cats of MoonClan and SunClan, it is time for us to face the biggest challenge any cat in the forest has faced before. We are not only fighting for our own Clans, we are fighting for the forest as a whole. We may be MoonClan, SunClan and LichenClan but tonight, we are one Clan!" The cats of SunClan and MoonClan cheered, Dawnstar felt a surge of fire through her body, Shadowstar was right. Tonight they were all one Clan; fighting to protect to the forest.

"It's time we leave!" Shadowstar announced. "I believe in each and everyone of you and I know that we will emerge victorious!" The Clans cheered once more, then they prepared to leave.

"Be safe okay?" Lionclaw said, Dawnstar could hear the doubt lining his mew. "You've got nine lives, but try not to lose any." Dawnstar noticed his claws digging into the ground.

"Don't worry." Dawnstar nuzzled Lionclaw. "I'll return, I promise." She pressed close against his mate, taking in his scent and warmth one last time before leaving. "You protect our kits, alright? Don't let anything happen to them...or yourself." Dawnstar voice choked, she had almost lost Lionclaw once; she didn't think she could do again.

"We will all be here when you get back, I promise." Lionclaw pressed back against her. "Come back soon, I love you." He whispered into her ear, giving her chills.

"I love you too." Dawnstar whispered back then looked towards her kits. Falconkit had already gone on the defensive of Ebonywing's kits, he was marching around the small bundles while they looked at him curiously. Dawnstar let out a small purr, everything would be just fine; it had to be.

MoonClan and SunClan met up with LichenClan as planned, Jaggedstar led his Clan proudly and he dipped his head respectfully. "Shadowstar. Dawnstar."

Dawnstar dipped her head in return. "Thank you for fighting alongside us, Jaggedstar." She mewed.

"There's no way I will be joining Thornstar, I'd been leading LichenClan for many moons and I'm not about to give this Clan up." Jaggedstar mewed proudly. Dawnstar noticed that a few of his warriors seemed very unsure. Dawnstar flicked her ears, they were probably just scared.

"Then it's time." Shadowstar lifted his head. "Let's go." The world was silent, Dawnstar focused on her breathing and pawsteps as they approached the Gathering Hollow, she wasn't sure if Thornstar was there yet; but she kind of hoped he would never show up. With each step Dawnstar wished that everything had been just a dream and she would wake up back in SunClan camp, but she knew that it was real. She also knew that she had to fight, no matter what she had to fight.

Dawnstar had her kits, Lionclaw, SunClan and all of the forest to fight for now. All of the cats she had lost and would probably lose tonight, she was fighting for them. Dawnstar lifted her head, they reached closer to the Gathering Hollow. Dawnstar pictured Falconkit and Honeykit in her mind, playing and being happy, healthy kits. Lionclaw watched over them, encouraging both to do their best. Turtleblaze and Fawnheart sat off to the side, laughing with Earthpaw and Mudpaw, Cinderflame, Yarrowtail, Pebblestep and Cloudspots were all laughing and talking with each other. Sandfoot sat with Applespots, Briarpaw and Cherrypaw and all of them were happy. More and more of SunClan entered the picture, all happy and safe. Dawnstar's heart pounded in her chest, a fiery energy raced through her veins. She would preserve that image, and

she would go home to it, Thornstar would never take that away from her; no matter what Thornstar tried.

The three Clans slowly approached the Gathering Hollow, Dawnstar peered into the hollow and saw AshClan, much bigger than she remembered. They all sat, muttering to each other; some of them looking uncomfortable and there were several cats that Dawnstar had never seen before. They must be the rouges and loners that Lilyclaw had mentioned. Dawnstar took a deep breath before descending into the hollow, Shadowstar and Jaggedstar seemed to be waiting for her word. Dawnstar dipped her head and the Clans moved forward.

Thornstar sat at the head of AshClan, Echoheart sat rather close and another cat, a tom with a matted dark brown fur and scars across his pelt sat next to her. Thornstar lifted his head, eyes sparking with confidence. "Welcome, Jaggedstar, Shadowstar and Dawnstar." He spoke loudly. "I was beginning to worry that none of you would show up."

"There's no way we would back down, Thornstar." Dawnstar stepped forward, raising her voice in a challange.

"You'll learn to regret those words my dear Dawnstar." Thornstar shook his head slowly. "You seem I've come prepared."

"With a bunch of flea-bitten rouges it seems like." Jaggedstar snorted. "Some *Clan* you've got there, Thornstar."

"Rogues they may be, but they have a certain fiery spirit in their hearts. They won't let me down." Thornstar chuckled.

"It's still a bunch of rogues and loners against three Clans of warriors who have been training for many moons in fighting." Shadowstar countered. "It would be best if you backed down now."

"But it's not just rouges, I have AshClan behind me and perhaps..." Thornstar's eyes traveled over the group. "Some others?" Thornstar stepped forward and raised his forward. "I see looks of doubt in the eyes of these Clan cats, if there are any who are smart enough to step forward and join the stronger side we welcome you!"

"No one will join you--" Shadowstar stepped forward, claws out but was cut off as three MoonClan warriors stepped forward, Mistflower, Bonefur, and Smallstrike. Each one looked from Shadowstar to Thornstar, the AshClan's eyes flashed with joy and malice. "What are the three of you doing?" Shadowstar demanded.

"Sorry, Shadowstar." Bonefur spoke with a flick of his ears. "But maybe Thornstar is right and it's time the Clans become one."

"Traitors!" Ashfeather hissed. "How could you do this to MoonClan? The Clan that raised you." He lashed his tail with fury.

"You just don't understand, Ashfeather." Smallstrike said, lowering his head, Dawnstar could see pain in Lightningwing eyes, she spat with fury and what seemed like heartbreak. "I wish you did." Smallstrike added sadly before joining the ranks of AshClan.

"Anyone else?" Thornstar purred, Dawnstar wanted to claw the arrogant look off his face, he was tearing the Clans apart and he was proud of it.

Dawnstar watched in shock as four LichenClan cats stepped forward, she wasn't shocked when she saw that Branchfur was one of them. The cat that had murdered Honeywing and broken Poppyfur's heart. "I should have figured." Jaggedstar growled, making eye contact with Branchfur. "I've always known you were a traitor."

Branchfur glared back at his leader. "You're a fool, Jaggedstar. I'll be glad to see your fall." Branchfur turned away, Owlheart, Oakflight, and Rowanwhisker all followed him without another glance over their shoulders.

"SunClan?" Thornstar leaned forward.

"SunClan knows better," Bramblepelt spoke. "We've seen your treachery and we know that you won't rule in unison with the other leaders; you'll destroy the forest." The rest of SunClan nodded along with Bramblepelt, Dawnstar felt a surge of pride in her Clan.

"There's one more Clan that needs to be questioned." A voice came

from the back and Dawnstar saw Riverstorm pushing her way forward.

"Oh look," Echoheart sneered. "The traitor shows her face."

"I'm not a traitor." Riverstorm spoke boldly. "My loyalty is to AshClan," Pain, anger and sadness crossed her blue gaze. "And this is not AshClan." Riverstorm shook her head. "I know there are several warriors within what remains of AshClan who are only following Thornstar because they are scared, well now is your time to step forward and join us!" She announced, there was a small mumbling between the cats, Thornstar shook his head.

"You're a fool, Riverstorm. I have my Clan's full--" Thornstar stopped himself as a group of cats stepped forward. Ashblaze was at the head of it.

"I won't watch you tear this Clan apart." He spoke, anger lining his mew. "I'm going to fight to bring you down." Ashblaze crossed the gap and faced Dawnstar, his ear remained torn from the very first time they had ever fought each other. "You now have my loyalty, Dawnstar." Ashblaze dipped his head. "You all do." Dawnstar nodded with respect.

More cats from AshClan stepped forward, including Silvermoon and Haresong's brothers, Stormheart and Wheatwhisker. They quickly joined their sisters sides. The next three cats to step up surprised Dawnstar, it was the three apprentices, Puddlepaw, Ravenpaw, and Skypaw; Lilyclaw's kits.

"We're leaving too!" Puddlepaw announced.

"We care about AshClan," Ravenpaw added. "But we hate Thornstar." The three kits quickly ran to their mother.

"I hope you realize the mistakes you have made." Thornstar spoke, lowering his head; eyes sparking with danger. "You could have survived."

"They *will* survive," Dawnstar stepped forward, raising her voice. "You will not win this battle Thornstar, I swear it on StarClan."

"StarClan can't help you now!" Thornstar shouted, claws shooting out. "AshClan attack!" Everything happened in the blink of an eye. The three Clans were rushed over by a wave of rogues, loners and the remaining AshClan cats. Dawnstar was knocked to the ground by a large rogue she had never met, claws digging into her side and ripping through her fur. Dawnstar let out a hiss of pain and slashed into the rogue's dark brown fur. His teeth went instantly for her throat and that's when she realize that these rogues did not fight like warriors, the only thing they would fight for is to kill. That's what Thornstar taught them.

Dawnstar shoved the rogue off of her, she ripped away from his claws and slashed at his ears, he stepped back and hissed with fury. "Why are you fighting for him?" Dawnstar demanded. "What is the purpose for fighting with this Clan?"

"Because I've been offered something better than anything I could ever ask for." The rogue growled. "And the cat who kills you gets the biggest reward." He jumped at her again, Dawnstar turned on her hind paws and slashed at his side. He may be strong and fighting to kill; but he wasn't a warrior. Dawnstar clawed his ears once more before slipping away from him; she didn't need to waste her time fighting a rogue, she had to focus on finding and stopping Thornstar. Dawnstar rushed through the crowd of fighting cats, she heard hissing and yowling in her ears.

Dawnstar broke out of the crowd and looked over the chaos, it was then she realized the true power of this battle. The Gathering Hollow, a place for truce and peace was filled with the fury of battle. Cats yowling in pain, blood splattering the green grass and turning it crimson. Dawnstar stared in shock and horror; this very well could be the end of all four Clans.

Chapter 47

Blood roared in Dawnstar's ears. Cats were yowling, hissing and crying in the pain. The world around her was a blur, the four Clans were fighting to the death. *I need to find Thornstar.* She told herself. *This will all end if he's dead.* Dawnstar had never taken another cats life, but she knew that none of this would end until Thornstar was dead. *My family, my friends, my Clan. They're all counting to me.* Dawnstar looked around, trying to spot his pale tabby pelt through the war zone. She saw Icepetal fighting side by side with Mossleaf of MoonClan against two tabby rogues. Icepetal had a wound down her side and Mossleaf's right ear was shredded and bleeding heavily.

I need to stop wasting time. Dawnstar told herself, taking a deep breath she plunged into the heart of the battle. Instantly, a rogue was jumping on her back, ripping at her fur. With a yowl of fury Dawnstar bucked, kicking the rogue off and causing him to fall to the ground. Instantly, she whirled on her paws and slashed at his face will full force, blood sprayed the ground and the rogue let out a wail of pain. He stumbled backwards, unable to open his eyes as they filled with blood.

"Get out of my forest!" Dawnstar spat and lashed out again, catching his ear and tearing it. The rogue hissed once more before turning back and vanishing. Dawnstar turned, looking for cats in help. She heard the cry of Cloudspots and instantly ran in the direction of her former's apprentice's wails. She found him backing away from two large toms, he had a large wound down his side and one of his eyes was stuck shut with blood due to a wound over his eye.

Letting out a battle cry, Dawnstar attacked one of the rogues. She dug her claws deep into his flank and ripped away at his flesh. He cried in pain and tried fighting back. While she attacked one, Cloudspots went after the other. Biting into his shoulder and pushing him away. The rogue that Dawnstar attack kicked her off and jumped towards her, going directly for the throat.

Dawnstar ducked out of the way and met him before he got to her, sinking her teeth deep into his shoulder. She bit down hard and raked her claws down his flank. He cried in pain and his friend shoved away Cloudspots to attack her.

"No!" Cloudspots cried and jumped after him, digging claws into his spine. Dawnstar broke away from the other rogue and turned to her apprentice. Cloudspots was on his back now, the brown rogue had pinned him. Dawnstar saw panic flash in his blue eyes as the rogue came in for the kill, but before Dawnstar could act Cloudspots did first. His teeth met the rogue's neck and he bit down.

The rogue let out a choking sound before his body went limp on top of Cloudspots. The gray and white warrior scrambled out from under him, looking terrified. The other rogue let out a cry for his fallen friend and ran away from Dawnstar and Cloudspots.

"I-I didn't want to kill him, I just--" Cloudspots stammered, stumbling backwards. His eyes were round with horror. Dawnstar touched her nose to his cheek.

"It's okay, Cloudspots. You had to save your own life. You've fought so well and I'm so proud of you." Dawnstar tried assuring him, and it looked like it helped. He stepped back and looked around, giving his wounds a sniff. Dawnstar looked out into the fury of fighting cats. "I'm going to have to kill Thornstar, many cats are going to die today."

"I wish it didn't have to be this way." Cloudspots said sadly.

"Me too." Dawnstar looked at the young warrior. "Stay strong, fight for your Clan. We will survive this, I promise."

Cloudspots just nodded, but Dawnstar could see a fire burning his eyes. She gave him a nod in return and ran back into the fray, still searching for Thornstar. She ran through the fighting cats, searching desperately for the AshClan leader. She could already see dead bodies, some rogues she didn't know but some she knew quite well. She spotted Foxwhisker and Mudpelt of LichenClan, Grasstail of AshClan, Smallstrike of MoonClan. *He turned his back on the Clans, but I wish he didn't have to die for it.*

A blur of red-brown fur caught Dawnstar's eye as she saw Jaggedstar wrestling with a jet black she-cat with piercing amber eyes. She clawed violently at Jaggedstar's face and throat, hissing and growling at him. Jaggedstar stumbled backwards, unable to keep balance. His amber eyes spread wide in fear as the she-cat's claws caught his throat. Blood sprayed out of his wound and Jaggedstar fell with a heavy thud. *No!* Dawnstar cried and jumped in after the she-cat.

She caught her off guard and bit deep into her spine, ripping at her skin and fur with her claws. The she-cat spat and ran off, leaving a trail of blood. Dawnstar turned to look at Jaggedstar, he wasn't moving. *Please don't let that have been his last life!* Dawnstar pleaded, but relief washed over her when she saw his paw twitch. Jaggedstar slowly opened his eyes and looked up at Dawnstar.

"Thank you, Dawnstar." He choked out, standing up with shaky legs. "That wasn't my last life but I'm getting too old for fights like this." He chuckled, looking around. "Have you seen any warriors of mine that have fallen?"

"I saw Foxwhisker and Mudpelt." She replied sadly, recalling the dead LichenClan warriors. Jaggedstar's eyes became shadowed.

"They were such good warriors, Foxwhisker was my mentor and Mudpelt was my kin." He dropped his head. "Thornstar is a monster." He growled. For a moment, Jaggedstar met Dawnstar's eyes. "You have to stop him."

"I'm doing everything I can." Dawnstar assured him. After making sure Jaggedstar was okay she turned to continue her search for Thornstar.

Not to far from the four trees of the hollow, Dawnstar heard the familiar voice of Cherrypaw and Briarpaw. They sounded like they were scared and in pain. As quickly as she could, Dawnstar ran towards their voices. She found them standing above the hollow, facing their brother.

"You could've had so much more, I'm already a warrior!" Thrushpaw hissed at them. "Thornstar named me Thrushclaw and I am his best

warrior!"

"Thrushclaw, please!" Cherrypaw cried. "You don't want this life, he is going to tear the Clan's apart! If he wins then he will murder our mother, don't you care about Applespots at all?"

"She's a useless she-cat!" Thrushclaw lashed his tail. "Thornstar is the only cat I care about! After I've killed the two of you then I will kill Dawnstar myself! Then Thornstar will worship me! I'll lead the forest when he's finished." Dawnstar looked at the young cat in horror, Thornstar had twisted his mind so horribly. How could any cat saw that about their own mother and sisters?

"We won't let you do that!" Briarpaw said, stepping forward with shaking paws. "I'll give my life to protect Dawnstar and the rest of the forest. Thornstar is a traitor to everyone he meets."

"Then I'll kill you first!" Thrushclaw leapt forward, tackling Briarpaw. Cherrypaw was quickly defending her sister, clawing at Thrushclaw's brown pelt. Dawnstar raced up to help them, but came to a stop as she noticed Thrushclaw rearing up on his hind legs, trying to kill his sister. Briarpaw was on her back and wailing in terror.

Cherrypaw cried and jumped forward, tackling her brother and sending them both the ground below. Dawnstar froze, watching in horror was the two cats fell from the top of the hollow. Thrushclaw landed on his back with a sickening crack, it reminded Dawnstar of the sound that her mother's spine made when she was killed by the badger.

Dawnstar ran to Cherrypaw's and Thrushclaw's side, Cherrypaw looked dazed but managed to stand up. She looked down at her brother, letting out a cry of horror. Dawnstar looked at Thrushclaw, his body was still and his eyes stared up at the night sky, empty and glazed.

"Cherrypaw!" Briarpaw cried down to Cherrypaw, the calico she-cat looked up at her sister with pain in her green eyes.

"Cherrypaw." Dawnstar stepped forward, pulling the two she-cats

attention. "I'm so sorry that you had to do that.

"He was my brother, but--" Her voice choked off, trembling. "He was going to kill Briarpaw..." Dawnstar helped the she-cat to her paws, her legs nearly giving out.

"Take care of each other, run back to camp if you need to. Please be safe." Cherrypaw looked up at Briarpaw, there was a haunted look deep in her green eyes. While Cherrypaw made her way back to Briarpaw, Dawnstar went back into the battle.

She spotted Sandfoot with a deep wound in her shoulder. She was supported by Violetfur who helped her away from the battle. Rustleaf of LichenClan was bleeding heavily from a wound in her side, she crawled away from a dead rogue and towards Seedclaw who quickly helped her to her side. The black and white tom was also lined with several wounds, he looked like he had been fighting hard.

This is LichenClan's infamous kittypet. Dawnstar thought. *He's no kittypet anymore.* Dawnstar turned away, looking into the battle. Cats were still fighting, cats were still dying. *This battle is only going to end when the three other leaders die or Thornstar dies.* Dawnstar closed her eyes. *Jaggedstar has to be close to his last life, but Shadowstar is a new leader. Thornstar may have all of his nine lives but so do I.* She dug her claws deep into the grass below. *I will give up each and every one of my nine lives until you die Thornstar! I refuse to let you win!*

Chapter 48

I will kill you Thornstar. Dawnstar told herself, running back into the battle of the Clans. *No matter what, I will stop you.* As she ran through the fighting, she thought back to all the times she had dealt with Thornstar. He was her mentor, he taught her everything she knew to this day. Yet he tried to kill her, he caused the deaths of Sunstream, Tigertail, her parents and any cat that had fallen here today. *You've caused the death of your own sun, Thornstar. I doubt he even cares.*

With energy coursing through her veins, Dawnstar ran through the fight. Warding off rogues who tried to attack her. She only had one goal, to find and kill Thornstar. She wouldn't give up, she had to keep fight no matter what.

"Traitor!" The voice of Cinderflame brought Dawnstar to a halt. She looked around, looking for her friend. She spotted her dark gray pelt and burning amber eyes and she tackled Rockfur to the ground. Dawnstar hadn't seen the former SunClan warrior since he had been exiled. Cinderflame's eyes burned as intensely as the fire that ravaged SunClan territory.

"Cinderflame, you do not understand! I'm doing this because it's right!" Rockfur wailed, clawing at Cinderflame. His claws caught her leg, sending blood spraying across the grass.

"This isn't right!" Cinderflame yelled in return, Dawnstar noticed Yarrowtail watching in horror from several taillengths away. "You're wrong! You've always been wrong!" Cinderflame tackled her father to the ground. "You didn't deserve my mother! You don't deserve any of us!" Cinderflame's body tremble, Dawnstar had never seen her so emotional. "All the things you said to your kits! Pebblestep saved the Clan! Yarrowtail is the best tracker SunClan has ever seen! Cloudspots is so brave and so full of energy he could fight the entire forest if he had to! But you, you're just a coward! You hide behind Thornstar because you're too scared to think for yourself!" The world to seem go silent as Cinderflame swung her

paw, claws tearing into Rockfur's throat. She fell off of her father and to the ground, her body trembling. "We all looked up to you..."

Dawnstar's heart twisted as she saw the look in Rockfur's eyes change, they turned into honey as he looked at his daughter. Blood poured rapidly from the wound in his neck, but he didn't seem scared about it. "You're right." He choke out, shocking Cinderflame, Yarrowtail and Dawnstar. "I'm so sorry, I wish I could take back the things I said. I thought I knew what was right but I was so wrong. I've failed you and your mother, I don't deserve wonderful kits like you. I'm so proud of all of you..."

Cinderflame stared at her father in shock as his voice trailed off. The light faded from his amber eyes and Rockfur died. Dawnstar approached Cinderflame. *So many families have been torn apart by Thornstar.* She thought painfully, remembering how Cherrypaw was forced to kill her own brother.

"Cinderflame." She spoke, the dark gray she-cat looked up. "I'm proud of you. You're one of the best warriors I could've asked for, you too Yarrowtail."

Cinderflame stood up, shaking her broad head. "I didn't want to kill him, and had I known how he truly felt.." He voice cracked. "I wouldn't have."

"Death is what made him realize that he was wrong." Dawnstar replied. "It's horrible that that's what it took, but you did what you had to do to protect the Clans, just like I have to."

"You have to kill Thornstar." She mewed, her voice dry.

Dawnstar nodded. "I only wish I could find him, he could be anywhere. Killing any cat I care about..." Images of Honeykit and Falconkit flashed in her mind.

"I saw him." Yarrowtail spoke him, clearly in shock by the death of his father. "He was fighting Shadowstar and Frostfire with Echoheart. I think Shadowstar lost a life." Dawnstar's heart twisted.

"Did you see where he went?" Dawnstar asked with desperation in

her mew. "I have to stop this."

"He went towards SunClan's tree at the other end of the hollow." Yarrowtail replied. Dawnstar began to run but was stopped by Yarrowtail and Cinderflame.

"You can't fight him on your own." Cinderflame mewed, her tone serious.. "He's going to have Echoheart with him, you'll need help." Dawnstar looked over the two cats, both with bold determination in their eyes.

"I wouldn't want any other two warriors at my side." She nodded, Yarrowtail and Cinderflame stood beside her. "Let's go find Thornstar." The three warriors broke into a sprint, going towards the end of the hollow. Dawnstar's heart was racing, if she found him then it would be a fight to the death. There would be no holding back, just fighting with all of her strength.

She looked from Yarrowtail to Cinderflame, two cats that she considered to be here best friends. *We can do this, as long as I have them.* She ran forward, her heart pounding. Yarrowtail and Cinderflame were at her side, ready to defend their Clan.

They reached the end of the hollow and Dawnstar's eyes scanned for Thornstar. She saw a flash of pale brown fur and looked towards the entrance of the hollow. She caught his malicious amber eyes as he slipped into the shadows with Echoheart at his side. *He knows.*

"Be careful." Dawnstar instructed Cinderflame and Yarrowtail. "He knows that we're coming, and it could be an ambush." *But I can't risk losing him.*

"We'll be ready." Cinderflame assured her. Dawnstar nodded and ran with her friends towards where she spotted Thornstar and Echoheart. They walked into the trees, she couldn't smell any other cats than the two of them.

That was, until she grew closer and could smell heavy amounts of blood. The three cats came to a dead stop when they saw the body of a cat, she was shocked to see that it was Branchfur of LichenClan. He had an incredibly deep wound in his belly, from his neck to his

tail. He was lying in a pool of his own blood with shock and terror in his eyes. *This is the cat who killed Honeywing and turned his back on the Clans.* Dawnstar reminded herself. *Still, I wouldn't wish this on any cat.*

"Dawnstar." A chilling voice spoke, Dawnstar looked up from Branchfur's body to see Thornstar, his claws extended and Echoheart at his side. "About time you came here, but it is a shame that you couldn't come alone."

"Why? So you could have Echoheart kill me while you watch? You've never been brave enough to do the job yourself." Dawnstar taunted. "What was it that you told me? Foxes, badgers and other cats, but never you."

"I also told you," Thornstar growled. "That I would make sure that you die by *my* claws. I wouldn't let any cat take away the pleasure of the killing you."

"Then let's fight, just me and you." Dawnstar stepped forward, holding her head high. "We both have nine lives to lose. I'll be ready to kill you each and everyone of those nine times until you're dead."

"So dark for such a peace loving cat." Echoheart twitched her tail.

"Shut up." Cinderflame spat. "Disgraceful she-cat." There was a low rumble in Cinderflame and Yarrowtail's throats.

"I'm not scared of you." Echoheart snorted. "I could kill both of you without losing my breath."

"Then do it!" Cinderflame moved like lightning, with Yarrowtail acting as quickly as she did. The two siblings tackled Echoheart to the ground, Thornstar turned his head and while he was distracted Dawnstar moved to attack.

She jumped with claws extended, meeting Thornstar's pelt and tearing into his skin. Thornstar quickly recovered and threw Dawnstar off. "I've taught you well." He laughed. "But not well enough! You'll still die!" Thornstar jumped onto Dawnstar, his claws tearing deep into her pelt.

She felt teeth in her scruff and before she realized what was happening, he threw her quite the distance away from Cinderflame and Yarrowtail. She rolled away and jumped to her paws, ignoring the pain of her wounds. He jumped and tackled her once more, they rolled down a small hill and neared the river. She could see SunClan's territory, the sounds of battle were far in the distance now.

"Now there's no where for you to run." Thornstar growled, his voice nearly turning into a laugh. "No Lionclaw to save you here, you're completely alone!" He jumped again, catching Dawnstar and knocking her to the ground. He raked down her belly, but she kicked her hind legs into his chest and pushed him off. He stumbled backwards, looking at her with dark eyes. "You can't cry for help." He chuckled. "It's such a shame, really." He attacked again, Dawnstar barely dodged. "You're going to die alone here, bleeding into the river. Then I'll kill your mate, your friends. I won't kill your kits though, I'll raise them to *hate* you. To be *like me*."

"I will never let that happen!" Dawnstar attacked, managing to jump onto his back. She dug her claws as deep into his skin as she could. "You won't lay a claw on my kits!"

"Try me!" Thornstar slammed her into the rocks below. Before he could attack once more, Dawnstar rolled away. She quickly turned to attack once more. The two leaders clashed, their claws ripping into each other's flesh and sending blood spraying across the ground below.

"I will make you suffer!" Thornstar gripped her shoulders, ripping open her old wound and throwing her across the ground. She rolled, hitting her head. The world blurred as the pain of her wounds was realized. She stood up on shaky legs, facing her old mentor. He stood up tall, without fear or pain.

I can't give up! She jumped back up, running into attack. Thornstar cut her off, slamming her to the ground once more and knocking the air of her lungs. "Oh, Dawnstar." He said, his voice dropping low. He placed his paw on her throat, extending his claws. She felt their razor sharp tips digging into her skin. "I was meant to rule the forest, you'll never be able to beat me." He leaned in, she could feel

his warm breath on her face. "Time to take what belongs to me."

It happened so quickly, his claws ripped across he throat. She felt blood spilling out, more blood than she had ever lost in her life. Dawnstar tried to move, but her body refused. *No.* She tried to forced herself to get up. She locked gazes with Thornstar, and his face was the last thing she saw and she faded into black.

Something felt wrong, Dawnstar opened her eyes. She was in the gathering hollow, but she could see *herself.* Thornstar stood over her as blood poured from a wound in her neck. *I need to fight.* She tried to attack Thornstar, but her body passed right through his. He shivered and looked around.

"Calm down." A familiar voice spoke from behind Dawnstar. She whirled around to see the group of cats who had given her nine lives, along with all the other cats who had died in the battle so far. "You're losing a life, Dawnstar." Flowerstar spoke.

"But," She cried. "He still has nine to lose! How can I beat him." Her head dropped.

"That's where you're wrong." A deep voice spoke, from the ranks of StarClan cats stepped Lionstar. His amber eyes were troubled. "Thornstar never came to receive his nine lives, we're not sure why but he didn't come to the moonstone."

Dawnstar's jaw dropped. "What? So he only has one life?"

Lionstar nodded. "You can beat him, Dawnstar."

"Remember the lives we gave you." Tigertail stepped forward. "Courage."
"Hope." Windflight purred.

"Determination." Blazeheart stood beside Windflight. "If any cat can defeat him it's you." Dawnstar looked at the cats she had lost, feeling their loss all over again.

"What if I can't." She whimpered.

A warmth stepped in front of her, she lifted her head to look up at

Flowerstar. "I gave you a life for judgement. You need to judge yourself, because I know you have the strength to defeat him." Flowerstar touched her nose to Dawnstar's forehead. "We are beside you, Dawnstar. Get back out there and *save the Clans!*" Energy, life and strength rushed through her body. She could feel the lives of all her lost loved ones coursing through her, as well as the lives of her loved ones that were still alive. *Everyone is counting on me. I can't let them down!* The cats of StarClan vanished and Dawnstar jumped to her paws, back into the living world and her physical body.

Thornstar looked at her with sharp eyes. "About time, are you ready to die again?"

"No." Dawnstar mewed sharply. "But I'm ready to kill you once." Thornstar tensed. "I know you didn't go to get your nine lives. You're nothing but a coward, Thornstar! Were you too scared that StarClan would reject you? Scared that you wouldn't be allowed to be a leader?"

"Silence! It's time for you die!" Thornstar charged forward, but Dawnstar did the same. She had a new energy inside her, she could feel all her nine lives beside her, even if one of them was lost.

Dawnstar fought with the force of ten cats, her claws ripping into Thornstar's pelt and sending him stumbling backwards. Blood flowed heavily from several wounds on his body, he looked up with fear in his eyes, but the hatred nearly overpowered it. "There will be another cat like me! Echoheart will take my place! I will never be defeated!" He attacked once more, clawing as hard as he could.

Dawnstar could feel him hurting her, but she powered through it. She fought back with the same might, ignoring her pain and going for his throat. She couldn't land a killing blow, she shoved Thornstar back to try and reposition herself. He quickly recoiled, trying to do the same thing. "You're too weak!" Thornstar spat. "You can't kill me and you never will! I will rule the forest!"

"You'll never rule the forest!" Dawnstar jumped forward, taking all of her energy into this one attack. She met with Thornstar, and quickly moved; her teeth sinking deep into his throat. She bit down hard, hearing a cry of pain from Thornstar. His body went limp and

Dawnstar fell on top of him.

She looked down at him, there were so many emotions in his eyes and she couldn't name any of them. He didn't speak, he just closed his eyes and his breathing came to a stop. Dawnstar stepped back, looking down at Thornstar's body. *He's dead.* It didn't seem real to her, the fighting would finally stop. Cats would no longer die to his claws.

She sighed, feeling her body start to ache. Dawnstar turned away, leaving him beside the river to go find Cinderflame and Yarrowtail. She ran up the hill and heard the sounds of fighting grow louder. She spotted her two friends still fighting Echoheart, the gray tabby was covered in wounds and had a wild look in her eye.

Her green eyes spotted Dawnstar and she came to a dead stop. "Dawnstar..." She breathed out. "But if you're here, then--"

"Thornstar is dead." Dawnstar spoke, cutting her off sharply. "I killed him and I'll kill you too." She stepped forward but Echoheart let out an ear splitting yowl.

"I will get you back for this!" Dawnstar prepared herself for an attack from Echoheart, but instead the she-cat turned and ran into the trees, towards AshClan territory. Yarrowtail moved to follow her but Dawnstar stopped him.

"Don't, we'll deal with her later. We need this fighting to stop." Yarrowtail and Cinderflame hesitated, but both cats nodded. Dawnstar ran to the gathering hollow, standing above the fighting. "Cats of the Clans!" Her voice rang out and the fighting stopped. "Thornstar is dead! It's time for you rogues to leave! If you chose to stay then you will meet the same fate as him!"

It didn't take long before the rogues started wailing and away from the Clan cats, into the territories and away from the fight. Dawnstar looked into the hollow, her heart twisting as she saw all the wounded warriors and dead bodies. *It has been a horrible night, but it's finally over.* She looked over her shoulder, where Thornstar's body lie. *We did it.*

We won.

Chapter 49

The fighting had stopped, but the sounds of battle still rang in the air. The wounded cats were being cared for, and Dawnstar was heading to MoonClan camp. She wanted nothing more than to see her kits and the cat she loved. Her body was sore and burned from the wounds across her pelt; but she refused to be seen by a medicine cat until every other cat was attended to; the fatal wound in her neck had closed and was no longer a threat. She was accompanied by Earthpaw who was helping Adderstrike and Mossleaf back to MoonClan camp as well. She had never seen the Clans come so close together, she was proud that they had worked together. Dawnstar moved through the forest quickly, jumping the river into MoonClan territory and rushing into the camp.

She was shocked when she got there to see two bodies lying in the middle of camp; one was of a rogue she had never seen before and the other dropped her heart into her paws. It was Hawktalon, lifeless and blood welling from a gash on his side. Panic shot through Dawnstar's blood, where were Honeykit and Falconkit, and Lionclaw? "Lionclaw!" She called her mates name, and sighed with relief as she stepped out of the leader's den, blood was clumped around his old wound, when she saw Dawnstar he rushed to her side; greeting her with nuzzles and purrs.

"Dawnstar! Thank StarClan you're alright!" He said with a slight pant to his mew. "I've been worried this entire time."

Dawnstar looked at Hawktalon's body. "What happened here? How did he?"

Lionclaw's eyes grew sad. "Some of the rogues came to MoonClan camp, trying to attack the kits. Hawktalon was the first one to jump in a defend them, but..." His voice choked off.

"I had never seen a blind elder fight so hard." Ravenheart, the MoonClan medicne cat mewed. "I just wished we could've saved him."

"We did all we could, and he saved all of the kits in MoonClan camp." Ebonywing purred kindly. "Hawktalon will be regarded as a hero by all four Clans."

"You're back!" Dawnstar heard the tiny squeak of Falconkit, he bounded out of the leader's den with Honeykit hot on his heels. Her heart jumped with love as she saw her two kits, safe and alive and they would remain that way.

"So since you're here..." Lionclaw said quietly. "I suppose that means that Thornstar is..."

Dawnstar stopped him before he could finish his sentence. "Yes, he is" She said, touching his muzzle with hers. "It's all over now."

"So who do you think is going to take over being leader and medicine cat for AshClan?" Lionclaw asked with a stretch. "They really don't have one."

Dawnstar shrugged. "Medicine cat I'm not sure, but Riverstorm is the proper successor to Lionstar." She explained. "But we will find out tonight." Dawnstar licked her pelt smooth, the Clans had agreed to take two days to recover and tend to wounds with no worries about borders and at the end of the two days would meet back at the Gathering Hollow and announce the changes and honor the fallen warriors. It was the end of the two days, and Dawnstar had gotten all she had wanted to in order. SunClan had discovered the death of Stormwind and Willownose after the fighting had stopped, and Rustpelt's wounds had been too severe and he died after returning to camp.

Dawnstar exited her den where Honeykit and Falconkit were sleeping, they had been exhausted from the trip back and all of the excitement, neither of them quiet understood the severity of the battle and Dawnstar was okay with that. They were still young; she didn't want them scarred for life. Dawnstar looked around her camp, it was quiet but the cats were moving along and recovering slowly but surely.

"Dawnstar." Dawnstar looked at saw Sandfoot limping from the medicine cat den. "I need to talk to you." The SunClan deputy had

been restricted to the medicine cat for her wounds.

"What about?" Dawnstar looked at Sandfoot with concern, her eyes were filled with a slight sadness and uneasiness.

"I've spoken to Pebblestep and I won't be able to perform any warrior or deputy duties for a while, not with this wound." She looked at her wound. "And we both decided it would be best if I not only stepped down from deputy but retired as well."

Dawnstar stared in shock at Sandfoot, she realized the she-cat was old but she didn't think she was old enough to retire. "Are you sure about this, Sandfoot?" Dawnstar questioned. The calico she-cat nodded.

"I've done my time for the Clan, I think. It's my time to retire; plus Nightwing will be lonely in the elder's den without Hawktalon. Not to mention, I don't have Rustpelt anymore." Sandfoot let out a soft chuckle, but her voice dropped and her green eyes were overshadowed with sadness at her lost mate. As for Nightwing she had been taking Hawktalon's death very hard, they had been mates since they were just warriors and now she had lost him. Dawnstar worried for the old queen, and maybe Sandfoot would be good for her.

"Very well, Sandfoot. That will be announced tonight as well, and who I chose to be the new deputy." She sighed. "Whoever that will be."

Sandfoot let out a purr. "Don't play that with me, Dawnstar. You know exactly who it should be." Dawnstar looked at her in confusion, but then realized. They were both thinking of the same cat, and she was a perfect choice for deputy.

The Gathering Hollow felt foreign and strange to Dawnstar, the scent of battle was still heavy in the air and the grass still stained crimson from the bloodshed that had taken place. She had to brace herself before stepping into the hollow, it wasn't an official gathering so she didn't take her place on her tree. The rest of SunClan felt uneasy being here as well, Dawnstar could still hear the fighting in the back of her mind. She shook her head, trying to

hide what had happened. However, she realized that hiding it was a bad idea; what had happened, happened and the Clans would grow from it; even if they were weak for the time being.

SunClan was the first to arrive, but MoonClan arrived shortly after. Shadowstar greeted Dawnstar kindly as he always did. "Welcome, Dawnstar. I hope SunClan has been recovering well."

Dawnstar nodded. "It's a slow process, but we have been. A lot of announcements to make tonight, but I hope they will bring joy and happiness in this time."

Shadowstar looked up at SIlverpelt. "I agree, now is a time to come together." He looked towards the direction of LichenClan as they entered the Gathering Hollow, Jaggedstar greeted them the same as Shadowstar.

"Any sign of AshClan?" Shadowstar questioned the LichenClan leader as he approached, the brown tom nodded.

"I heard them talking on my way here, they should be here any time now." As Jaggedstar said that, AshClan entered the hollow. Dawnstar saw several cats that she had fought against, their heads hung low and they didn't make eye contact with anyone. Riverstorm was at the front of the group with Ashblaze beside her.

"Welcome, AshClan." Dawnstar stepped forward. "I hope all is well."

Riverstorm nodded. "It's been rough, and we have a lot to figure out and I have many announcements tonight but we will make it."

"Then perhaps we should get started right away." Jaggedstar said. "We all have many announcements to make."

"I think AshClan should start." Dawnstar suggested, they had suffered the most damage in this battle, and Dawnstar wanted to see how well they would recover.

Riverstorm dipped her head. "Very well," She raised her voice. "With the agreement of several warriors in the Clan, it was decided that I become AshClan's new leader. I journeyed to the Moonstone last night."

Dawnstar dipped her head respectfully. "Then we happily welcome you, Riverstar." She looked at the new AshClan leader with pride, she had ran when Thornstar took over but now would rule AshClan into a bright future.

"Welcome, Riverstar! Leader of AshClan!" Shadowstar cheered happily.

"Riverstar! Riverstar! Riverstar!" The cats of all four Clans welcomed the new leader, Riverstar lowered her head humbly.

"Thank you all for the welcome." She looked up once more. "I also have a few ceremonies to perform. First, my new deputy." She looked towards Ashblaze. "I say these words before StarClan, so they may here and approve my choice, Ashblaze will be the new deputy of AshClan!" Once again the Clan cheered proudly. "And with the loss of Moonwhisker, we did not have a medicine cat to replace her, but one cat stepped forward and decided to become AshClan's new medicine. We welcome Skystorm as the new AshClan medicine cat!" Skystorm dipped his head, he was one of Lilyclaw's three kits. "And with that I want to welcome two new warriors," Riverstar continued. "Ravenpaw and Puddlepaw, step forward." The apprentices stepped forward shyly, normally warrior ceremonies weren't performed in front of all four Clans. "Ravenpaw and Puddlepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan even at the cost of your lives?" Both cats gave an "I do". "Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names; Ravensong and Puddleclaw; AshClan is grateful for your bravery and loyalty and we welcome you as full warriors of AshClan!"

"Ravensong! Puddleclaw!" The Clans cheered, Dawnstar felt a certain happiness welcoming the warriors of other Clans, and three cats who had fought hard beside her.

"Finally, we want to thank the other four Clans for defending AshClan, and allowing us to keep going the way we are." Riverstar dipped her head, Dawnstar could hear a deep sincerity in her voice.

"Of course, Riverstar." Jaggedstar spoke. "AshClan was led astray by a tyrannical leader, and we welcome AshClan back as one of the four Clans, and it will forever remain that way."

Shadowstar nodded agreement. "Now, Dawnstar." He looked towards the SunClan leader, "Would you like to go next?"

Dawnstar stepped forward, running all the announcements she had planned in her head. "To start this off I would like to name three new warriors; all three fought hard in the battle and I couldn't think of any better warriors to have in SunClan. Rosepaw, Cherrypaw and Briarpaw step forward." She hadn't shared the news with either Cherrypaw or Briarpaw yet, she wanted to see their reactions; and if they felt ready for it. Both she-cats eyes widened with surprise, but they stood alongside Rosepaw "Do you three promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan, even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do." Rosepaw spoke first, firmly and proudly.

"I do." Cherrypaw hesitated only for a moment, but Dawnstar could see it in her eyes how ready she was.

"I do." Briarpaw was the last to speak, the timid she-cat had been welcomed into SunClan and fought bravely against her father and brother.

Dawnstar felt pride rushing through her body, this was her first warrior naming ceremony as leader and she was glad it was these three apprentices, no others had earned it so much. "Then by the powers of StarClan I give you your warrior names. From this day forward you will be known as Rosewind, Cherryleaf and Briarrose. SunClan welcomes you all as full warriors and commends your loyalty and bravery."

"Rosewind! Cherryleaf! Briarrose!" Dawnstar was happy to know that these three got the same welcome as the AshClan apprentices.

"There's two more announcements I must make," Dawnstar said, speaking up again. "Sandfoot has decided to join the elder's den, and although Sandfoot could not make the journey here due to her wounds, I have the next deputy in my mind." The other Clans waited patiently and offered a few words of luck for Sandfoot. "I say these words before the spirit of StarClan so they may here and approve my choice, Cinderflame will be the new deputy of SunClan!"

Cinderflame had also not been told of her new position in the Clan, her eyes widened in shock. "Are you serious, Dawnstar?" She questioned, she looked from the three Clan leaders to the three deputies, they all nodded approvingly, she stepped forward; amber eyes glowing. "I wasn't expecting this, but there is nothing I love more than fighting to defend my Clan. I will be the best deputy that I can be."

"I know you will." Dawnstar sat down and dipped her head, she felt confident in her choice. Cinderflame was one of her best friends, and she knew she made the right choice.

Shadowstar and Jaggedstar didn't have much to report, and when they finished the Clans bid each other farewell and returned to their own territories. The battle was over, and they were four Clans again and it was time to go back to how things used to be. So much had changed since the day Willowkit died, Dawnstar blamed herself and made a promise to become leader, a promise that she had kept.

Dawnstar was leader of SunClan, she had two kits whom she adored, a mate who loved her and the cat that had terrified her for so long was dead. SunClan looked up to her, and she would lead them as long as she possibly could. Dawnstar had eight lives left, all of which would be dedicated towards her Clan. As she moved through the forest and back home she realized that all of the pain and troubles she had endured throughout her life had been worth it for right now, she had everything she could ever want. She looked up at the sky, wondering what the future would bring.

Special Thanks

Hi there!

Thank you so much for reading *Dawnstar's Trouble.* I've been working on this story for seven years. It's been restarted several times but this time I was able to finish it. I want to thank you so much for taking the time to read this story, it means the world to me.

This is not my only book, coming soon is a whole series that is about Honeykit and Falconkit called A New Horizon. The first book is called Sun Awakening and is already complete, not to mention I have a whole bunch of Super Editions planned.

If you read this and continue to read my books then I am so incredibly grateful, writing is my passion and I love writing about Warriors which is what started my love of writing.

So thank you, reader. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this story, and I hope you come back for more!

~DawnfireOfSkyClan

Dedicated to Rudy
My real life Warrior.
May StarClan light your path.